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COLLECTION
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BY MRS. FRILLING
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCCXLIX.

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LONDON: PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1794. 4s. 6d. per volume.

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BY MRS. TROLLOPE.

AUTHORESS OF

“THE WIDOW BARNABY,” “THE WIDOW MARRIED,” “MICHAEL ARMSTRONG,” ETC. ETC.



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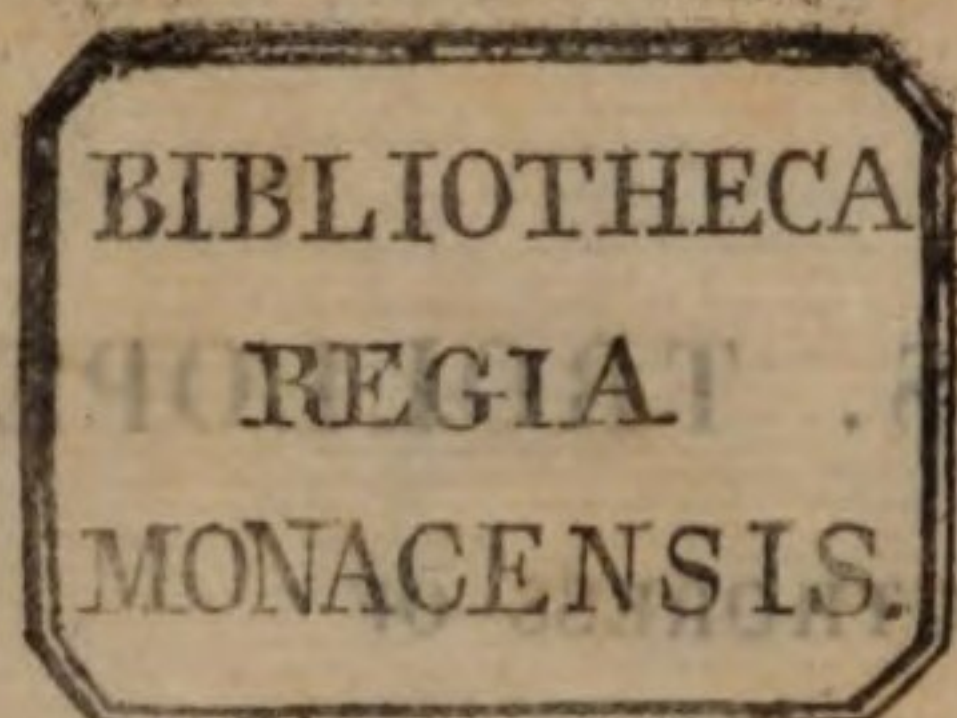
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THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.

CHAPTER I.

Great News—An English Farmhouse as it ought to be—Family Gossipings—The Hero introduced and shown to be capable of sustaining a favourable Reverse of Fortune, without extravagant Glee.

“THIS is a great event, a very great event,” said the grey-headed but still comely Thomas Chesterfield, as he finished the perusal of a short epistle which the cross-country postman had handed to him through the open window of his rustic parlour.

“What have you got there, my dear?” demanded his wife, withdrawing her hand from the stocking she was mending, and taking up her snuff-box in its stead.

“I have got here, Dorcas, what will make your heart dance. But keep quiet, sit still; don’t twiddle your snuff-box, and I will read it to you. It is dated Gloucester, my dear, ‘Gloucester, 22d April, 1838,’ and it begins, ‘Sir!’ and then it goes on, ‘I am commissioned by Messrs. White and Bricknell to inform you that by the will of the late Mrs. Catherine Newton, of Fairlybury, your son, Charles Chesterfield, is entitled to the sum of four thousand four hundred pounds, together with a diamond ring, which, as recorded in said will, the said Charles Chesterfield kissed upon he forefinger of the said Catherine Newton’s right hand, in the year 1823. Understanding that the said Charles Chesterfield is still an infant, the said sum of four thousand four hundred pounds, together with the said diamond ring, will be paid over and delivered into your hands, you being his natural guardian, upon your applying at the office of Messrs. White and Bricknell, College-street, Gloucester, for the same.’”

“Thomas Chesterfield!” replied his wife solemnly, “such news is too great and too good to believe lightly. I am not sure if it would not be something like impiety to believe it just at the very first moment, as if we could think ourselves deserving of

such an unaccountable dispensation and blessing! And think, Thomas, what a bitter thing disappointment is! God forgive me! but I do believe it would go near to break my heart if I *was* to make up my mind to believe it, and then find out that it was not true after all. Don't let us believe it till we have got more certainty, Thomas! Pray don't."

"If you will tell me, my dear, how I can get more certainty," replied her husband, joyously rubbing his hands, "I'll set about it, and no time lost, depend upon it. But I must say, wife, this letter strikes me as being as much like a true statement as any thing I ever saw."

"I'd say so too, Thomas, though I am no great judge of such matters, to be sure, but I'd venture to say that it did look quite real if it wasn't for one word. Doesn't it look like making fun, husband, the calling our Charles an infant?"

"Bless your dear innocent heart! is that all?" replied old Chesterfield, laughing heartily. "A pretty good proof that I have contrived to keep true to my own doctrine, and taught my good woman to mind her own business, and never trouble herself about that of other people. Thank God, my dear, you know no more about the lawyers and their lingo than you do about the Emperor of Russia, or the Pope of Rome. But I must now let you into their ways so much as to tell you that they never speak of man, or woman either, under the age of twenty-one years, without calling them *infants*, and therefore they are quite right, you see, about our Charles, for he won't be twenty-one till next December. Will he, my dear?"

"No, that he won't, for sure and certain," replied Mrs. Chesterfield. "On the 17th of next December, by the blessing of God, he will be twenty-one years old, and not one minute before, and if that's enough to prove the truth of it, true it is, and no falsehood in it. And don't I remember, Thomas, the darling creature's kissing Mrs. Catherine's ring? That's what I do, as well as if it had happened but yesterday. And well do I remember, too, the notice she took of him, and how she pushed back his pretty curly hair to look at him; and I mind her very words as she did it, 'I've got a pretty godson any how,' said the old lady, kissing him. 'It is a pity,' says she, 'that my poor old friend didn't live to see her grandson, and he such a beauty!' But who would ever have thought that just because this notion about his prettiness entered her head when the child kissed her ring, she should have bequeathed it to him, and a fine large fortune into the bargain? It is past my comprehension, Thomas Chesterfield, and that's the truth."

"Then in course, my dear, if you can't comprehend it nobody else can," replied her husband, twinkling his laughing black

eyes; "so perhaps it will be no use for us to stir any further in the matter."

"Oh, Thomas! how can you make a joke about it, even for a moment?" replied Mrs. Chesterfield, looking terrified at his levity. "Over-merriment is always sure to bring over-sorrow after it; and besides, dear husband! it is no fit matter to joke about, any how. Think what a thing it is to have all our trouble over about that dear wonderful boy! Four thousand four hundred pounds, Thomas, is a fortune for a gentleman, and he may live independent upon it to the end of his dear blessed life, without ever being pestered more about having to get his own living. Think of that, husband, and let us thank God."

"I do, Dorcas, I do. It is indeed a most blessed chance, and as unexpected as it is welcome. Mercy on me! it is hardly an hour ago since I felt a pang at my heart, as I watched Charles with his reading-book under one arm, and his writing-book under the other, walking as usual into the orchard, as if there was nothing else to be done but read and scribble from morning to night."

"And now, blessed be God! there is no need that he should ever do any thing else," said the happy mother. "The parson, and I too, Thomas, have told you, scores of times, that the dear creature wasn't made to dig nor to delve, no, nor to manage a farm neither, as his good father has done before him. Don't it seem as if God had managed it all from the very first, when our vicar took such a fancy for teaching of him?"

"And when you took such a fancy for persuading every body that because he was tall and thin, with a pale face, curly hair, and pretty eyes, he was born to be a scholar and a gentleman?" replied her husband.

"Yes, sure, husband. It has been all providential throughout, and I shouldn't wonder, no, not the least bit in the world, if Mr. Westbrook was to allude to it in the afternoon discourse next Sunday. He wouldn't be likely to do it in the morning, I don't think, because it isn't impossible but some of the Grange family might be at church, and they might think the compliment was over particular, you know."

"Likely enough, wife. But now you talk of the Grange, I can't but think that it would be no more than proper for me to step over and tell Sir George the news. Only I should like to tell our Charles of it first. He'll be at the vicar's, I conclude; but I suppose I must not run over the fields to tell 'em, must I, wife?"

"What! without me?" cried the good woman. "Oh, Thomas! you could not have the heart to do it. Could you, now?"

"I don't think I could, Dorcas, that's the truth; so I believe

we must be contented to wait till the dear boy comes home to dinner."

"But I shall burst, Thomas, if I can't tell it to nobody before that time. Isn't it unlucky that Christopher should happen to go this very day about the Welsh sheep?"

"At any rate, my dear, we can tell Susan, and her little niece, you know, and there will be no small pleasure in that. Won't Bessy's pretty eyes dance in her head?" said the good-natured farmer, again rubbing his hands together with unspeakable glee.

"No doubt the dear child will be delighted," replied Mrs. Chesterfield. "She is a kind loving-hearted little creature as ever lived, and I shall never like her less than I have ever done from the first day as Christopher let his wife bring her into the house. She has been a good child to them, and to me too. But it won't do, you know, Thomas, noways at all to encourage any nonsense now between her and Charles. Things are altogether changed, and that Susan must see, and Christopher too."

"Bless your dear head, Dorcas! how women's thoughts do gallop! Why, Bessy is but a child, and, pretty as she is, I don't believe Charles ever thought of her no more than if she was his own sister."

"So much the better. And now remember, husband, that we never, either of us, mention such a notion again to any body. It is a deal too silly to think of, and there's an end of it. Come along, then; Susan and the girl are both in the cheese-room, you may depend upon it, for I heard them walking about wiping the stock over, whilst we were eating our breakfast."

The venerable farmhouse in which this conversation took place was a fine specimen of what farmhouses ought to be, and what many of them were in the olden time, uniting a sort of rude dignity with all the professional peculiarities necessary to the convenience of the occupant. It was not a red-roofed, white-walled tenement, having a parlour on one side and a kitchen on the other of its doorway, but was fabricated of large blocks of stone, to which time had given that sober tint of grey on which the eye rests with such unfailing pleasure. Its slated roof nearly corresponded in colour, and proudly reared itself at the front of the building into four lofty peaks, each one surmounted by a carefully-preserved huge ball of lead, which added greatly, in the estimation of the Chesterfield family, to the beauty of the building. Beneath each point was a widely-spreading casement-window, with mullions of neatly-cut stone, though the diamond-shaped little panes between were still set in lead, and supported without by iron bars. In size, the mansion was perhaps rather larger than was necessary, as the chamber denominated the

cheese-room might have satisfied a dame of no very lowly ambition as a ball-room, and not one of the sleeping-apartments of the family was less than about twenty feet square, except indeed that of little Bessy, which was over the somewhat narrow entrance-hall, having a pretty window of smaller dimensions, and lighter proportions than the rest, and exhibiting therefore the only suspicious point in the otherwise very consistent antiquity of the whole fabric. On the ground floor, though the external appearance remained unaltered, there had been some few twistings and turnings contrived, by which the actual windows of the principal sitting-room had been turned towards the orchard, instead of fronting the high-road; an improvement suggested at the marriage of Mr. Chesterfield's father with the daughter of a neighbouring clergyman, who was said to have been greatly addicted to reading, and who was in truth the identical lady for whose memory Mrs. Catherine Newton had testified such affectionate regard. On the opposite side of the house from this large quiet parlour, was the enormous kitchen, with its chimney that seemed a dwelling within itself; its wide-spreading dresser, still gorgeous in its rare treasure of well-preserved pewter, its long, narrow, six-inch-thick table of solid oak, its well-stored rack of hams and bacon, its settle, its benches, its vast meal-bin, and all the other unfailing appurtenances to a farmhouse kitchen, so dearly familiar to eyes well-accustomed to the country, and so redolent both of rural labour and of rural ease.

The shortest way to the little staircase, always used for approaching the cheese-room, lay through this kitchen, and it was not without an effort that Mrs. Chesterfield passed by her old and faithful servant Rachel, who was busily engaged in preparing the dinner, without giving her a little hint that she had received some very glorious news; but she perceived that her husband folded up the letter and put it into his pocket with an air of determined silence as he preceded her, so she suffered no more of her happiness to escape than could be compressed into the unusually jocund pronunciation of the words, "Well, dear good old Rachel! how do *you* do?" She waited for no answer, however, lest the inquiring look of the old woman's eye might beguile her into indiscretion, but stepping on briskly after her husband, gently seized upon his arm as he mounted the stair, saying,

"Let us go in together, Thomas!"

They did go in together, and as there was no letter in the old gentleman's hand, and nothing more intelligible than a smile on the old lady's lip, those they had come to visit went on with

their occupations, without testifying either surprise or curiosity at their arrival.

"The stock is in fine condition, mother," said Mrs. Christopher Chesterfield, adding to the neatly-built pile of "double Gloucester," that reared its goodly bulk before her, the cheese she had just wiped.

"Is it, my dear?" replied the old lady, with a very unmeaning titter.

"Have I not worked well, granny?" demanded the very prettiest rustic beauty, whose round arms and dimpled hands ever ministered to the nice manœuvres of a dairy. I have done every one of these my own self; all these I mean, from here to there!" and as she spoke she raised herself from her stooping posture, and threw herself into so pretty an attitude as she indicated the extent of her labours, that a sudden light seemed to flash across the intellect of the worthy yeoman, and he quite unconsciously exclaimed, "Well, now, to be sure it will be very odd if he don't!"

These words being quite unintelligible to Bessy, she threw away the neat linen cloth which was the only implement of her boasted industry, and springing towards the old man, encircled his right arm with both her own, looking very lovingly into his face, and saying, "Please to tell me what you are talking about, grandpapa?"

"I have got something to show both of ye," said the old gentleman, good-humouredly patting her glossy brown hair with the hand she had left at liberty; "but I can't, you know, if you hold my arm this way."

"Now then! let us see it!" cried the young girl, placing her hands behind her to demonstrate his being at perfect liberty.

"We have great news for you, my dear Susan,—great news, I consider it, for all the family," said Mr. Chesterfield, drawing forth the important letter. "This is all I have got to show you, Bessy," he continued; "but there's that in it as you'll think worth more than a new bonnet, if you are the good-hearted little girl I take you for."

"What *can* there be in that letter, father, to make both mother and you look so unaccountably happy? To be sure the Thompsons haven't given up the water-course, have they?"

"No, Susan, that's not it," replied her father-in-law, slowly unfolding the precious letter, as if to prolong his own enjoyment.

"Oh, don't be so long about it, husband!" exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield, "or upon my word and honour I shall speak it out straight, without waiting for the reading."

"Listen, then, my dears," said the old man, "and then tell us, both of you, what you think about it."

While he said this, Mr. Chesterfield put on his spectacles, the open letter being so held the while as effectually to prevent any younger eyes from penetrating its contents, and then deliberately and distinctly read it aloud, from date to signature, his good wife enjoying herself the while by looking first at one face and then at the other of the astonished listeners.

“Our Charles going to have a fortune of four thousand four hundred pounds, and a ring made of diamonds?” exclaimed Mrs. Christopher Chesterfield, almost in a scream.

“Yes, Susan my dear, that’s what’s going to happen to him,” said Mr. Chesterfield, folding up the letter with a sort of sublime composure.

“If that’s in the letter, you shan’t put it away till I have kissed it,” cried the long-chartered Bessy, catching it out of his hand, and pressing it again and again to her cherry-coloured lips. “Poor Charles! Poor dear fellow! Then he never need be told any more about being idle, because he is not so healthy and strong as the rest of us. Poor dear Charles! ain’t I glad, I wonder! No, aunt Susan, we did never—did we?—hear such good news as that before in all our lives, did we?”

“I don’t know which way to turn for joy,” responded Mrs. Christopher; “and my good man will be gladder still, if possible. How he has fretted and fretted over that poor dear boy, and prayed and preached to him into the bargain; but all to no good. Now, thank God! there is an end to it all, and the poor fellow may be as idle as he likes, without bringing ruin upon himself or any body else.”

“There’s no great likelihood of ruin to my son Charles, at any rate, Mrs. Susan,” said her mother-in-law rather tartly; “and I should not be greatly surprised if some others, besides me, were to find out now what I have often tried to teach them before—namely, that Charles Chesterfield was born to be the honour of his family,—not the ruin of it.”

“Oh, dear mother!” returned Susan, submissively; “I did not say ruin that way. But you can’t be angry with me, mother, you must be too happy to be angry. Where is the dear fellow? Let us go and wish him joy.”

“He would look mightily startled if you did,” said the farmer; “for he does not know a single word about it yet.”

“That’s right!” cried Bessy, clapping her pink little hands. “Then I shall be by when he’s told, shan’t I, grandpapa?”

“Yes, you shall, Bessy; and if Christopher was but here, every thing would be quite perfect.”

“Can’t you put off the telling till Christopher comes, father?” said Susan, beseechingly.

But this proposal, despite its exemplary conjugal tenderness, was overruled by the united voices of both the elders; and the party adjourned to the parlour, where the cloth was already laid for dinner, and there placed themselves in happy but anxious conclave till the hero of the morning's wonderful adventure should appear.

Three times did Mr. Chesterfield, at the request of one or the other of his companions, draw forth his ponderous watch to inform them how many slow-footed minutes had still to creep away before they might hope to hear the sonorous clock in the hall strike two; and twice did Bessy, unable to control her impatience, steal into a side closet that opened by a glass-door upon the orchard, and commanded a full view of the path across the paddock which led to the vicarage, in the hope of seeing the beloved legatee approaching. But with all these well-imagined devices to pass the time away, it seemed endless. And who can wonder, when in fact it was three minutes and a half past two when at length the sound of steps became audible on the gravel-walk, which led up to the above-mentioned glass-door?

"Here he is!" cried Bessy, whose ears were the first to catch the sound; and as she spoke she started to her feet, giving thereby cause to suspect that she meditated the iniquity of running off to meet him.

"No, no, Bessy," said the old lady, making her way towards the closet of egress; "fair play's a jewel; no forestalling, if you please. If I consent to stay here with the rest and wait for him, I am sure every body else may."

Thus schooled, Bessy sat down again, and so did Mrs. Chesterfield also; her husband and daughter-in-law attempted not to stir, and as the chairs they occupied were all placed against the wall, the whole party looked very much like a set of children who were doing penance.

At length the wished-for moment came; the glass-door was heard to open, and the instant after, the slight figure of Charles Chesterfield, his straw hat in one hand, and rather more books than he could conveniently carry in the other, stood within the parlour.

"I am afraid that I am very late," he exclaimed, as he entered; "but Mr. Westbrook's watch stopped, and we had not the least idea how time was going. Are you all angry with me, or only making fun, that you sit round so stiff and formal?"

Bessy burst into a jocund laugh.

"Thank you, Bessy," said the young man, stepping forward, "I don't mind now; all's right, I see; but I really am very sorry for having kept you all waiting."

While he was speaking his mother rose from her chair, and, reaching the place where he stood, just as he had finished the sentence, threw her arms round him, and silently pressed him to her bosom in a very passionate embrace.

Hardly had this ended, when both his hands were taken by his father, and very energetically pressed, while, with glistening eyes, the old man fervently uttered,

“God bless you, boy!”

Puzzled and half frightened, though he knew not why, the young man mechanically turned his eyes towards his sister-in-law, thinking, it may be, that he might learn from her how to interpret a reception so perfectly unintelligible to him. But if he looked at her with any such hope, he met nothing but disappointment; for, more mysterious, if possible, than all the rest, she sat with her hands clasped, as in deep thoughtfulness, while a shower of tears bedewed her handsome face.

“What *can* all this mean?” demanded the young man, placing himself at some distance from them all, and regarding the whole group collectively. “What can have happened to make you all receive me so strangely? Pray tell me, father, has any thing particular occurred since breakfast this morning? Thank God! it can’t be any thing very bad to any of us, or else Bessy would n’t laugh so.”

“I will tell you, my dear boy,” replied Mr. Chesterfield; “and truly you have a right to ask, for our strange looks may well puzzle you. Yes, Charles, something particular has happened, something very particular, and it is about yourself, Charles; and that is the reason why you found us all sitting up waiting for you so.”

“Something very particular about me, father? Oh! father! you have n’t let Christopher persuade you to article me to Mr. Williams, have you, sir?”

“No, Charles, no. Christopher would have been the last to do such a thing. He only named it, because he thought you would be likely to prefer the law to farming. But it is nothing of that sort, my boy; and if you stand guessing for a twelve-month, you’ll never find it out. Have you any recollection, Charles, of an old lady called Mrs. Catherine Newton, whom your mother once took you to see at a fine large house, where there was a beautiful garden, and a great big hall where you ran about, and rode upon my stick?”

“I don’t remember riding upon your stick, sir; but I do remember the old lady, and the room that she sat in, and the fine large screen all covered with pictures, that was behind her.”

“That old lady is dead, my dear boy.”

“Is she, sir?” said Charles.

“Do you remember any thing else about her?” demanded his mother. “Do you remember any thing about a beautiful diamond ring?”

Charles shook his head.

“No, mother,” he said, “I remember nothing at all about the ring. But could we not talk about the old lady without waiting any longer for our dinner? You cannot think how hungry I am.”

“Oh, Charles! Charles!” exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield, again opening her arms to embrace him; “that old lady, that dear blessed old lady, has left you by her will—may I tell him Thomas? May I be the one to tell?”

“Her beautiful diamond ring, I suppose?” exclaimed the youth. “Well, mother, and if she has, I’ll give it to Bessy, because she has such uncommon pretty little hands; unless, indeed, it is too big to fit her nice little fingers; and if it is, I will give it to you. Only do let us have some dinner.”

“Yes, Charles,” said Mr. Chesterfield, gravely, “Mrs. Catherine Newton did leave you her diamond ring, which is a very different thing from what you seem to fancy, and one not to be given away in that wild way to any body. But that was not all she left you, my dear son; she has done a great deal more than that. Do you think you have strength of mind to hear some very good news?”

“Yes, father, I hope so,” said the youth, in an altered voice, which betokened both gravity and agitation.

“She has left to you, Charles Chesterfield, the sum of four thousand four hundred pounds.”

“Father!” cried the boy, almost gasping for breath; “will it be enough to keep me without working at farming, or at being a doctor, or a lawyer, or any thing else?”

“Yes, my dear boy, I should think it would.”

“Thank God!” cried the young man. “Thank God! no wonder you kissed me, my dear mother. Indeed, you must all kiss me, and wish me joy; for, certainly, I am the happiest fellow in the world!” and following his own suggestion, he very cordially embraced the three females, and then wrung his father’s hand, saying, with deep feeling, “God grant, my dear sir, that I may never use this money in any way that you shall not approve; and don’t fancy that I want to lead an idle life from what I have just said. Many people work very hard, dear father, without following any trade or calling. Mr. Westbrook will explain that to you, if you will ask him.”

“By giving themselves up altogether to book-learning? That is what you mean, Charles, is it not? If such is your wish, my dear boy, there can be no harm in it now; though, to say the

honest truth, I don't see much good in it, either. However, that's neither here nor there. If your will is to be a great scholar, I know no one that has a right to say you nay. Your elder brother will inherit from me the same hundred and thirty-seven acres that I inherited from my father, neither more nor less. If this good luck had not come to you, Charles, I must have charged the land with something to the tune, perhaps, of seven or eight hundred pounds, to set you going in some way or other. But now no such thing will be necessary; so one and all we have reason to rejoice as you said, my dear fellow, as well for our own sakes as yours. But you said you were starving ever so long ago, and old Rachel must be at her wit's end to guess why we don't ring the bell."

"I do not feel so hungry as I did, father," said Charles, pensively.

"You have dined upon good news, Charles, have n't you?" said Bessy, looking kindly at him.

"I suppose I have," was the reply, but it was uttered with a gravity that made Susan smile, as she thought to herself that her young brother-in-law was already beginning to be conscious of the mighty cares proverbially inseparable from wealth.

But the bell was rung, and the dinner come; and old Rachel, and Sally the dairymaid, and Joe the man of all work, were all made happy, and full of gossip for a month, by being told the news, and invited to drink their lucky young master's health in a bumper of gooseberry-wine.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Westbrook is made acquainted with Charles Chesterfield's good Fortune, and gives his Opinion concerning the Mode of employing it—The young Man does not quite agree with him.

A DESSERT does not necessarily make part of the dinner of a Gloucestershire farmer, even when he farms no man's land but his own, and that land consists of one hundred and thirty-seven acres. So as soon as the servants had taken their gooseberry-wine, uttered their salutations, and retired, Mr. Chesterfield got up, and, once again drawing from his enormous fob its massive occupant, said,

"There is plenty of time yet for me to make a morning visit to Sir George, and truly I must take care that none other than myself carry this news to him. Come, Charles, come with me, will you? We shall have a pleasant walk, boy, with such news on our tongues, and the vicar won't blame you for giving your books a holiday this afternoon."

"No, father; that's quite certain. But yet I hope you will

excuse my going to the Grange with you. Should not Mr. Westbrook be the first I tell it to, father? Tell me, shouldn't he?"

"I can't say but what he should, Charles; I won't deny it; so you must go your way, my dear boy, and I must go mine, while we leave the women to enjoy talking the matter over by themselves. Won't Sally be mistress in the dairy to-night? I don't believe either one of you will have any mind to look after her, and therefore, Bessy, as I am quite sure you will make holiday, you may come across the fields if you will, in about an hour's time, and walk along home with me."

Notwithstanding the precedence due to age, it is our young hero we shall follow first. He left the parlour at the same time as his father; for, till they reached the boundary of the orchard, their path was the same. There they parted; the old man bending his steps to the showy residence of a man of the world, who, though not in parliament himself, knew perfectly well the exact value of every vote for a friend who was, as well as the worth of sundry other neighbourly accommodations which the familiar intercourse between himself and old Chesterfield was sure to bring; and the young one taking the well-known path to the dwelling of the vicar, who presented, perhaps, as strong a contrast to Sir George Meddows in all things, as it was well possible to find.

It was with a quick and eager step that Charles Chesterfield strode onward from the point at which he quitted his father, in order to reach the very humble parsonage of his bachelor friend. But after a minute or two his pace relaxed; the flurry of his spirits, which had made the immediate communication of the change in his fortune seem absolutely necessary to him, subsided; and such a longing for solitude and meditation succeeded, that he turned hastily aside from the pathway to seek the shelter of an oak coppice at no great distance. True, indeed, the rich leaves of vigorous undergrowth which in the summer made the spot he sought a sylvan bower, were as yet wrapped up in their close purple buds; but the form of the ground, which sloped rapidly down to the margin of a brook, together with the multitude of stems and leafless bushes which covered the ground, would, he well knew, suffice to furnish the shelter he coveted. There was, too, one especial spot beside this stream, which had for years been his favourite day-bed; it was a little hollow nook, the sides of which were thickly lined with primroses "now in their newest gloss," and in this nook he was stretched at his length within five minutes after he had parted from his father.

Of the few modern poets which this strictly obedient pupil of the venerable Westbrook had been permitted to read, Beattie was

decidedly the favourite : probably, because he was the only one with whom the wondrously-restricted limits of his small experiences enabled him to feel a perfect sympathy. All that unnumbered novels are to the hearts and minds of fashionable young ladies and gentlemen, the few sweet pages of the minstrel were to him. Not a line did they contain, but had been repeated a hundred times within that self-same nook where he had now taken refuge; and whatever imputation of vanity may rest upon our hero in consequence of the avowal, it cannot be denied that the words,

“ Young Edwin was no vulgar boy,”

did perforce, and despite of all the modesty he sought to cherish, go to his very heart, and suggest an idea of such close resemblance to himself, as irresistibly, and at a very early age, had set him to try his skill upon the

“ One short pipe of rudest minstrelsy.”

This occupation had indeed now become so habitual, and so fascinating to him, that the idea of every other had long grown distasteful; and at the time when the news of his most unexpected legacy reached his parents, they were both suffering great anxiety, in common with their eldest son and his worthy wife, as to what mode of life they should get him to adopt which might enable him to contribute to his own support. As no child had blessed the union of Christopher and Susan, they naturally looked upon the young Charles, who was ten years his brother's junior, as the ultimate heir of the family acres; and gladly would they in some sort have adopted him as a son, and assured to him the continuance of an easy and comfortable existence under the paternal roof, had it not been too plainly evident, despite the boy's quiet and even submissive manners, that there was a vein of latent ambition within him, which would have rendered such a life utterly distasteful to him. Of the indulgent kindness of his family, and of his own feelings under it, he was quite as well aware as they were themselves; and many were the hours spent by him in solitary musings upon the possibility of his rising, by the strength of his own genius, above the humble and obscure position in which nature had placed him.

Mrs. Catherine Newton's legacy fell upon his spirit with all the brightness and, as it seemed to him, with all the sublimity of a ray direct from heaven. He felt himself called and chosen. Our “young Edwin,” though “splendour he heeded not, nor gaud, nor toy,” was destined by fate, as it seemed, to become one set apart by Providence from those amidst whom he was born, for hidden but doubtless high purposes, which in the fulness of time would be known and revealed to all.

There was something in this vague future inexpressibly delightful to Charles, accompanied as it was at this moment with the firm persuasion that he was secured for ever from the fear of being exposed to any pecuniary distress; and truly wise was he for having thus turned aside to enjoy, in all the perfection of solitude and repose, speculations so delicious. It was not till after an hour thus spent that he at length started from his couch of prim-roses and remembered his errand. His conscience gave him one little pinch of reproach, as he thought of the friend without whose aid the mental powers of which he was so delightfully conscious might have been born to blush unseen within his father's orchard; he could hardly forgive himself for having preferred a communion with his own spirit, to conveying the news of his high fortune to his generous tutor, and he now hastened towards his abode with a heart overflowing with affection and gratitude.

In the conduct of Mr. Westbrook towards him, there had been indeed sufficient cause for both. Attracted quite as much by a look of delicate health, as by his pretty face and intelligent manner, the poor and forgotten, but learned and excellent, vicar of Charlton had early taken a fancy to the boy, and finding him apt, affectionate, and gentle, had by degrees undertaken the task of his education for no other reward than the pleasure he found in it. Old Chesterfield, too proud of the learning thus bestowed upon his son, and too grateful for the manner in which it was done, to dream of challenging its usefulness, had gone on from year to year, soothed by the assurance he received from many that his boy was a prodigy, till, when it was too late to help it, the whole family began to discover that poor Charles was a great deal too learned to be useful.

Mr. Westbrook, notwithstanding his long and complete seclusion from the world, would hardly, however, have held himself justified in thus deliberately unfitting the young man for the situation in which he was born, had not his mother, who doted on this gifted child of her old age, repeatedly taken occasion to assure him, that her Charles would never want for any thing, and moreover, that did he attempt to exert himself in the farm like his brother, his life would be endangered by it, as from infancy he had been much more like the delicate offspring of a nobleman than the hardy child of a farmer. Thus licensed to continue his very pleasant task, the idle scholar contrived to make his own existence and that of his young pupil exceedingly agreeable, by introducing him to a really intimate and familiar acquaintance with the poets, philosophers, and historians of Greece and Rome; and having succeeded in this to his perfect satisfaction, entertained not the slightest notion that the young man was

more profoundly ignorant of every thing else than the worst-taught grammar-school boy in the kingdom.

The old man was sitting on a sheltered bench in the south-west corner of his garden, with his hands crossed on his breast, and his eyes all but closed in sleep, when the rapid steps of Charles aroused him.

“Have I waked you, sir?” said the young man.

“No, Charles, no—I was not quite asleep, though very near it, I believe. I did not know you were coming back to me, my dear boy, or I would have had things ready for you.”

“If *you* are ready,” said Charles, gravely, “if you are ready to listen to me, my best and kindest friend, that is all I want—I have strange news for you, Mr. Westbrook, very strange news indeed. I have had a fortune left to me, sir; a large fortune as it seems to me—four thousand four hundred pounds! And I want your advice as to the manner of life that you think I ought to pursue.”

“I am most heartily rejoiced to hear it, Charles,” replied the good man; “the sum is fully sufficient to permit your going to college, and taking orders: a destination *I* have ever wished for you, my dear boy, though I have never hitherto advised it, from knowing—rather too well perhaps—that it is not favourable for a man’s happiness that he should enter the church without any other means of living, or of marrying, Charles, beyond what the profession affords. But the sum you mention is sufficient to assure you a moderate independence, with the help of a college living, and I have little fear but that the result of your examination will be a scholarship.”

Charles listened with the most respectful attention; but when the old man ended, he remained profoundly silent and, as it seemed, lost in thought.

“Do you not approve of this plan, my dear boy?” demanded Mr. Westbrook.

“I cannot explain, even to myself, what it is that makes my heart beat so!” replied the youth, with heightened colour and a trembling voice. “But I do not think, I do not believe, sir, that I have at this time any call to the ministry.”

“Then God forbid, Charles, I should urge the sacred calling upon you! I am not surprised that you should feel confused and puzzled by this unexpected change in your circumstances; and doubtless it would not be wise to decide on any thing so important till you are more quiet and composed. I am very much obliged to you, my dear boy, for coming so immediately to tell me this; and now I shall send you home again, for well can I guess that your good parents must part with you very unwil-

lingly at such a moment. But I shall see you again to-morrow as usual, shall I not?"

By no means sorry for the *congé* which again left him to the paradise of his own thoughts, Charles readily promised to return on the morrow, and then once more plunged into the deepest covert that the neighbouring grounds could furnish. Charles Chesterfield revered his instructor, nay, he loved the old man sincerely, but at this moment he felt that there was a terrible lack of sympathy between them. In good truth, the going to college, and the taking orders, was a process that had no more resemblance to the day-dreams in which he had revelled on his bed of primroses, than the movements of the Lord Mayor's state coach to those of Taglioni. It was not a college, it was not an university, which he coveted as a scene of action. It was the world, it was London, for which he panted. Fame, renown, applause—applause, renown, and fame, such as he had heard tell of, even in the deep retreat of Charlton, as having been achieved by an individual called Sir Walter Scott, and by another named Lord Byron. These were men of whom he had often thought, though, as yet, he had never been happy enough to fall in with a line from the pen of either; but these were the sort of people, as he told himself, whose exertions he determined to emulate, and whose fame in his heart of hearts he hoped to equal. It was unfortunate, poor Charles felt it was very unfortunate, that his good old friend should have hit upon this notion of his going into the church; for he thought it not at all unlikely that his father and mother might approve it, and in that case he should have many difficulties before him. The next hour or two, therefore, was spent by the ardent young man in fortifying his spirit against opposition, and in strengthening his mind into the determination of following all the noble and sublime ideas which his genius suggested to him, in spite of all that friends or kindred could urge to the contrary.

His good father, meanwhile, had been fortunate enough to find Sir George Meddows at home, and sitting alone in his library, circumstances which eventually proved so favourable to the wishes of Charles, that he was almost tempted to declare, when made acquainted with the facts, that his legacy would, in his eyes, have been of little value without them.

CHAPTER III.

A Man of the World—Talents for Business—Disinterested Friendship and high-minded Condescension—Different Opinions—A Dinner-party.

"Do I disturb you, Sir George?" said Mr. Chesterfield, on per-

ceiving that the baronet was sitting before a table covered with papers and accounts.

“Disturb me, neighbour !” replied Sir George, gaily. “If you do, upon my soul I am very much obliged to you ; for a duller occupation than mine can hardly be devised by mortal man. Look here, Chesterfield ; a pretty collection, are they not ? However, thank my stars, I have settled all these,” he continued, laying his hand on one, two, three, four thick packets neatly tied up in red tape.

“That’s a good thing at any rate, Sir George,” replied the old man cheerily, and patting the closely-stowed packets with very friendly satisfaction ; an operation which he would probably have omitted, had he been aware that the only *settlement* they had received consisted in their having been all snugly tied up about ten minutes before by the illustrious fingers of the gentleman to whom they were addressed.

“Why, yes,” rejoined the baronet, “it is always a good job to set things in order. I rather pique myself, Chesterfield, on the style in which I get through the business. Few men get over the ground faster than I do. How are they all at home, Chesterfield ? I have not seen any of you for these hundred years—not since last shooting-season, have I ? I was devilishly vexed that I could not get down at Christmas, for I had made up my mind to give a general merry-making to every man, woman, and child on the estate. But it was quite impossible. In short, I was commanded another way, and could not help myself. But I swore then, that Easter should not pass without the kitchen-chimney’s smoking at the Grange. Hospitality is hereditary among us, Chesterfield ; I don’t believe there’s a family in the county that can beat us there.”

“What, are the tenantry to have their Christmas feasting now, Sir George ? That will please the lads and lasses, if it is only for the novelty of the thing.”

“I am sorry to say that’s out of the question just now, my good friend. The truth is, I have not an hour to spare ; I came down, in short, merely to give an eye myself to all these sort of things” (pointing to the bills that covered the table), “and as soon as I have settled them all, I must be off again.”

“Well then, Sir George, I must hold myself very lucky to have caught sight of you just for this minute ; for I have a bit of news I want to tell you, Sir George, and maybe I may take the liberty of asking your advice.”

“And I have not a friend in the world to whom I could give it more readily, Chesterfield. You know how heartily I esteem you, and how firmly I trust in your honour and integrity at all

times—I should never have borrowed money from you, Chesterfield, if I had not.”

“Don’t name that, Sir George. I am proud and happy to have served your father’s son. My news, Sir George, will give you pleasure, I think, because you have always taken so much notice of my boy Charles; and this morning I received a letter by the post informing me that old Mrs. Catherine Newton, of Fairlybery, who was the boy’s godmother, is just dead, and has bequeathed to him, by her last will and testament, four thousand four hundred pounds, and a splendid diamond ring.”

“God bless my soul, Chesterfield! you don’t say so? What a delicious windfall! Tax provided for, and a diamond into the bargain! What in the world, my good fellow, do you mean to do with it?” was the baronet’s reply.

“Why, there is nothing can be done with it at present, Sir George, because the boy wants seven or eight months of being of age, and, of course, it must be in government securities till then. But what I want your counsel about, Sir George, is what we had best be thinking of doing with the boy. As a child, his mother fancied he was always ailing, and therefore he has been let to give more time to his learning (which was the only thing he took delight in) than was perhaps quite fitting in his condition. But this pretty independence sets all that right, and with learning and money both, there is no reason in life why he should not make himself a gentleman. Do you think there is, Sir George?”

“None upon earth, my good friend, none upon earth. It is, in fact, the only situation he must think of. I tell you what, Chesterfield, I would do more for you than for any man living—I would upon my soul! When a service has been done me, I never forget it—I would rather be burned alive, and have my worthless cinders scattered to the four winds of heaven! But enough of this, my good friend. You understand me. You read my heart, every inch of it; I know you do. Now hear me. If my own brother had a son exactly in the same situation, there is but one thing I could do for him, and that is to invite him to go with me and my family to London. There your boy’s remarkable talents will be sure to bring him forward. I remember every word his excellent mother told me about his extraordinary faculty of making verses. At the present moment there is nothing which so certainly leads to fortune, and I should not mind betting a thousand to one, that if you will trust Charles with me in London, he will become one of the most celebrated young men of the day, and probably an author of very high distinction.”

“Indeed, Sir George, your goodness and condescension takes

me so by surprise, that I hardly know how to answer you," said the greatly flattered yeoman. "You must be pleased to have the goodness to let his mother and me have some short space of time to think about it. But let what will come of it, we must ever feel beholden to your generous kindness."

"Don't mention it, my good friend. Your vote and your friendship are well worth such a mark of neighbourly kindness in return. But as to hurrying you, I would not do it for the world. Unfortunately, it is absolutely impossible for me to delay our return to town beyond Monday; but if you and your dear boy will dine with us on Sunday, we shall be able to settle all about it."

"Many thanks, Sir George; but we old-fashioned folks never dine out of a Sunday," said the good man, gently.

"True, true, my good Chesterfield — admirable, admirable regulation! I have no words to express how deeply I esteem you for it! Would to heaven my own position was one to allow me to follow such an example! But stern necessity forbids this, and I can only venerate the practice, without hoping, at the present moment, to be able strictly to adopt it. Saturday, let it be then, my worthy neighbour. Do you and your young son come and dine with us on Saturday, and then I trust that the pleasant scheme I have sketched for his advantage will be finally decided on."

Having said these words in the most cordial and friendly accents, Sir George Meddows rose from his chair, which was, of course, a signal that old Chesterfield should rise too, which he accordingly did, and, after receiving a very affectionate shake of the hand, took his leave, ruminating during his homeward walk upon the amiable character of his aristocratic neighbour, and deciding, in his own mind, that, spite of all which folks might say about his gay living and extravagance, he certainly had one of the most friendly hearts that ever a gentleman was blessed with.

Punctual to her appointment, little Bessy was lingering under the shelter of an avenue of old elms, outside Sir George Meddows's park-gates, and, on seeing her old friend pass through them, she hastened to meet him.

"You have not made a very long visit, grandpapa," said she; "I suppose our grand neighbour was too busy to talk much about Charles?"

"You wrong him, Bessy. He was very busy when I went in, and about things that I should be sorry to interrupt; for it was just the work that his best friends would desire to see him at. He was going over his accounts, my dear, and had just been settling a heavy quantity of bills: but that was done before I went in, so, thank goodness, I did not stop that good work.

But as to his not finding time to talk about Charles, you are quite out there, Bessy; for if the dear boy had been his own natural blood relation, he could not have seemed to take more interest in him."

"Every body loves Charles," responded Bessy.

"Yes, that 's true, too; there is a great deal of kind feeling for the boy, and no great wonder, for he never puts himself in any body's light, and is always easy and civil to every one. But the kindness of Sir George goes greatly beyond what any of us could have hoped or expected, Bessy. Would you believe it, my dear, he wants Charles to set off with him to London directly, that he may introduce him, and make a gentleman of him, as he says, suitable to his talents and his fortune."

"And will Charles go, sir?" enquired little Bessy anxiously.

"I can't answer that, my dear child," replied the old man. "It seems to me to require a good deal of consideration. Yet, after all, I doubt if Charles himself ought not to be the only person to decide."

"Then he won't go, I 'm very sure," said Bessy eagerly.

"And what makes you think that, my dear?" replied the old man, stopping short, and looking earnestly in her face.

Bessy coloured a little, but answered, without much hesitation, "Oh! because I don't think he would like to leave all his old friends."

"Well, we shall see, Bessy. I feel as if my old head was turned, and if his young one keeps steady under it all, I shall wonder."

On arriving at home, they found that Christopher, the good man's eldest son, and as fine a specimen of an honest, honourable, frank-hearted English farmer as could be found between John o'Groat's house and the Land's End, was returned, and was still listening, while a dish of eggs-and-bacon grew cold before him, to the wonderful history of the morning.

"God bless you, dear father," said the young man, starting up, as soon as his parent entered. "This news that Susan and my mother have been telling me is excellent for us all; but it is for your sake I rejoice the most, for it is from you it will remove the most anxiety. Poor Charles, he may love learning as much as he likes now, father, there is no danger of its proving a snare to him."

"And I was not the only one that was anxious about him, Kit," answered the old man, with an expressive pressure of the hand he held. "But where is the dear boy? We ought to be all together now, both for the pleasure of looking in each other's faces, and seeing all the happiness they show, and because I have got something new to tell you all."

“Something new, husband!” exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield, eagerly; “and you coming from the Grange? God bless you, man, we can’t wait for Charles—can we, children? Speak it out Thomas—tell it at once.”

“Well then, Christopher must give me a cup of his ale, and I will. Sit down, all of you, and you shall hear what I have got to say, which truly may be told twice over without any fear of your being tired of listening; for, may-be, you must hear it more than once, or twice either, before you will either understand or believe it.”

After this preface, Mr. Chesterfield, having seated himself between his wife and son, recounted to them very faithfully all the kind things Sir George Meddows had spoken concerning Charles; his proposal that the young man should accompany the family to London; his great hopes for his brilliant literary success, and finally the dinner invitation for Saturday.

“It never rains, but it pours!” exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield.

“God help the dear boy!” said Susan; “it is enough to turn his head, coming all together so.”

“Poor Charles!” murmured little Bessy; “I am quite sure that if he has got his own way, he will never go to live in London.”

The heir of the Chesterfield acres took a draught of ale, wiped his mouth, and said nothing.

“You talk like a fool, Bessy,” said the old lady, giving herself an impatient jerk; “I should like to know how you can tell what he will, and what he won’t do?”

“There is nobody knows him so well as I do, granny,” replied the unsuspecting girl. “It is always to me that he talks of his poetry and his stories; I don’t believe he says a word about it to any body but me—no, not even to Mr. Westbrook—about the last beautiful story; I am sure he has not, because he told me so himself—and that is the reason why I think I can make a good guess about what he will like, and what he won’t like; and he won’t like going to London, and leaving the flowers and the birds—the running brooks, and the nightingales, and the moon. I am as sure as if he were here, and told us so himself, that if he follows his own wishes, he will not go to London.”

“If he follows mine, he won’t go, I’ll own that much,” said Christopher, breaking silence; “though I should be loth to interfere with giving advice that should vex him. What I should like for him, wouldn’t be going to London; but glad and proud should I be if he would spend some of his money in getting himself made a parson. That’s all head-work and heart-work, and wouldn’t try his strength any way that could hurt him. And then, you know, our good Mr. Westbrook might have him for a curate;

and think what a pleasure for Charles to help him in his old age. And he wouldn't want to be paid either, having such plenty of money himself, and always living here the same as he does now. That is what I should call a happy scheme, and a safe one."

The parents looked at each other; and it required no very profound knowledge of physiognomy to perceive that the suggestion of their eldest son, respecting his brother, was highly agreeable to them. But Bessy, on hearing these words of wisdom, could by no means restrain her approbation of them to any such silent demonstrations, but suddenly running to her uncle, she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed once and again the broad high forehead, from which the closely-curling brown hair was already receding.

"Charles has no need of knights, nor baronets either, to advise him what he ought to do, as long as he has got such a brother as you, uncle Christopher," said she, leaning over the back of his chair, and fondly resting a hand on either shoulder. "You won't send him to the great house, will you, grandfather, to learn what he is to do with his money?"

Susan smiled, and gave a very approving wink and nod, at hearing her own sentiments thus freely and fearlessly proclaimed by her young relative; while the old Mrs. Ghesterfield, who approved what she had uttered much less than the young one, knit her brows, and fidgeted in her chair, very plainly evincing that every word she had uttered was in direct contradiction to her own opinion. And, in fact, Bessy looked so animated, and so very pretty as she spoke, that the old lady felt all her terrors return lest the lowly little maiden should entrap the affections or the fancy of her highly-gifted son, and thereby cause him to neglect all the opportunities which were likely to fall in his way, for still further improving his fortune by means of a wealthy and honourable marriage. This idea tormented her dreadfully, and in this, the very first day of her darling's good fortune, went far towards neutralizing all the happiness it ought to have brought her.

The old man, however, having "no such stuff in his thoughts," listened to the little girl with very affectionate approbation, and said,

"You could not speak more sensibly, my dear, if you was twice as old; and though I shall never, as long as ever I live, forget the kindness and condescension of Sir George Meddows at this most critical moment of our dear boy's life, I can't but say that little Bessy is right, and that we have no need to look further than our own good sound-headed Christopher for an adviser."

"And yet, father, though I believe in the main we all think much the same upon the subject of Charles's going to London, it

would go sadly against me to be set forward as the one that put the first spoke in his wheel, if so be he has set his mind upon going. It would look for all the world as if I was envious of his doing and seeing more than the rest of us. So you must not mind one single bit what I said about making him a parson, if it turns out that he has got no mind for it."

"As to his being made a parson, Christopher, and a dean, and a bishop, when the proper time comes for it, neither Charles himself, nor any body else, can possibly see any thing to find fault with in it," said Mrs. Chesterfield. "But that's no rule, as I can see, why he shouldn't go to London, too, and cultivate the goodwill and familiarity of such-like people as the Meddows family. For how is he to be known to the queen, or the lord chancellor, or any of those sort of people, if he never goes to London? and that's the only way, as we have heard Mr. Westbrook say over and over, for a person to get on in the church. So my say is, Christopher, that he should do the very thing you advise, and yet not make his mind up neither to break straight away from all the friendship and honour that Sir George seems ready to offer him."

Farmer Chesterfield smiled with considerable satisfaction at the various proofs of worldly ignorance which this speech evinced; but as the smile was much more good-humoured than sarcastic, it did no harm, and as Bessy returned to her place beside her aunt Susan, and took no further part in the conversation, the discussion proceeded in the most amicable manner possible, and was only interrupted from time to time by an exclamation of surprise that Charles should stay so very long with Mr. Westbrook.

The sun had set, and the soft twilight of a fine April evening was rapidly growing dim, when at length the glass door of the closet was again heard to open, and the minute afterwards Charles stood amongst the party who were so eagerly expecting him. If instead of having been meditating on his great good fortune, the young man had passed the hours since they parted in struggling to support manfully some heavy sorrow, he could hardly have presented to his friends a countenance more pale and careworn.

The hearty and truly fraternal congratulations of Christopher seemed, however, to rouse him from the state of languor and exhaustion into which he had fallen; his young eye kindled anew at the fair prospects opening before him, and once more a smile of hope and happiness chased the anxious thoughtfulness that had appeared to have settled on his brow.

"How glad I am to have you back again, Charley!" said his mother. "I thought we should have had to go to the Vicarage to look for you. Why, my dear boy, you have staid long enough

to settle what you are to do every year of your life, if you live to a hundred. What did the good man say to it, Charles?"

Greatly relieved by this concluding question, the answering which enabled him to pass over the former portion of his mother's speech in silence, Charles replied, "That his old friend was as much delighted by the good news as she herself could be."

"No doubt of it, no doubt of it," said his father. "But there is more news yet to talk of before we go to bed, Charles; before you hear it, though, I should like to know what good Mr. Westbrook said about your plans for the future. Did he speak his notions, Charles, as to what he thought it would be best for you to take to, by way of a calling and manner of life?"

A flush of embarrassment dyed the cheeks and the brow of the young man with crimson. But the truth must be told, and while he nerved himself to utter it, he nerved himself also to endure with the unshrinking firmness of a stoic the burst of approval which in his heart of hearts he felt quite sure would follow the statement of Mr. Westbrook's suggestion.

Every eye was fixed on him, but it was that of Bessy only which discerned in his heightened colour something that was neither eagerness nor joy, nor yet timidity. She was quite sure that whatever Mr. Westbrook had proposed had been something very different from what his pupil desired to hear from him; and when, after a moment's delay, Charles replied, "Mr. Westbrook thinks I should do well to get ordained," she felt as certain that the proposal was distasteful to him, as if she had been the sharer of all the soaring, wild, and ambitious thoughts which had been chasing each other through his fevered brain during the last two hours.

To know and to feel this was quite sufficient to produce the most complete revolution in all her own views of the subject. Ten minutes before, the idea of *Charles Chesterfield's being made a clergyman* appeared the very highest flight to which her affectionate ambition for him could reach: but no sooner did her mind receive the conviction that such a destination would be contrary to his own wishes, than with the rapidity of magic, the whole aspect of the thing became changed both to her judgment and her inclination. The little girl did in truth love Charles Chesterfield a thousand fathoms deeper than she had any notion of; and yet she was quite aware that she loved him much, fully as well, she was sure, as if he had been her own brother, instead of only her cousin by marriage, and quite enough to make her know for a certainty, that it would be very wrong and very cruel to contradict his wishes or control his will.

A great deal has been said and sung about "young love," yet

a great deal more, all vastly new and original, remains to be said and sung. As no two forms or faces are exactly alike, so neither, in all philosophic probability, are any two human hearts. And herein lies the best excuse I know of for the ceaseless continuity of narratives of which this busy organ is the theme. Not any other one of the deeply interested group who heard Charles's reply to his mother's question, though they were all more or less sharp and intelligent, derived from it any information whatever as to his own feelings on the subject. They all observed that he was somewhat agitated, but in this even there was no cause for wonder.

"And what said you to the good man in return?" demanded old Chesterfield.

"Father! I could say nothing certain," replied the young man. "I must have more time to think before I shall be able to say what I would or what I would not be."

"True, my dear, very true. I like to hear you speak so wisely, and it is the more necessary, Charles, because you will immediately have to decide, my dear boy, between plans so exceedingly different from one another, that beyond all doubt you will have need of your very best steadiness and reflection to decide which will suit you best. I won't deny, Charles, that I believe we in the old farm-house parlour here shall all think one way; but that's no argument against your having an opinion of your own, you know; and so now I will tell you what Sir George Meddows says about it."

Little did Charles Chesterfield think, as his father pronounced these words, that they prefaced intelligence infinitely more important to him in his own estimation than any which had hitherto met his ears throughout that eventful day; and it was with a feeling of restored composure, arising from the belief that the agitation in which he had passed the last few hours was now to be exchanged for a state of very calm indifference, that he prepared to listen to his father's statement of what it might have been Sir George Meddows's pleasure to say, on hearing of the legacy which had been bequeathed to him.

It would be difficult to find any words, not liable to be stigmatized as hyperbolical, capable of doing justice to the emotions which Mr. Chesterfield's narrative produced on his young son. The gates of an earthly paradise seemed opening before him. Sober reason was for the moment utterly upset, and though the wish and the power to express all he felt were equally distant from him, there was a flashing of the eye, and a smile upon the lip, that once more taught poor little Bessy to understand him.

Those who professionally study the operations of the human

intellect declare, that the first and surest symptoms of a distempered wit may be traced in the capricious incongruity of the affections. According to this test, Charles Chesterfield was at this moment decidedly mad, for all that had hitherto been dearest seemed suddenly to become indifferent and even distasteful to him. A mysterious sanctity, indeed, appeared to envelop his father and mother, which, hanging round them like a veil of holiness, kept them safe and apart from the wild havoc that vanity was making with less sacred feelings. But when Susan uttered some little affectionate domestic phrase, indicative of the comfort of family union, his heart seemed turned to marble. His brother's friendly voice aroused within him a spirit of opposition, for no other reason than that the tones were those of reason, and therefore likely enough to be hostile to the wild schemes already conceived, and already dearer to him than all the relations in the world. And as for little Bessy, he looked at her soft eye and blushing cheek with a feeling little short of terror, for he was conscious that he had of late become aware how greatly she surpassed in beauty every other girl of the neighbourhood: he was conscious, too, that her innocent prattle had sometimes won him both from his pen and his book, and the idea that it would be a pang to part with her, and that this pang *might* some day be too strong to bear, caused him to shudder at the very thought of loving her, and added another quill to the species of *chevaux-de-frise* by which he was beginning to surround himself. All, in short, which at that critical moment of his existence seemed good and gracious in his eyes lay enshrined in the velvet words of Sir George Meddows, as repeated to him by his father. He dared not trust his voice to express the feelings they inspired, for full well he knew that none who heard would understand them, and so strong was the effort he made to speak with a composure which he did not feel, that he greatly over-acted the part he attempted to assume, and replied in accents that seemed to denote the most profound indifference,

"It is very obliging of him."

"Well done, Charles!" said Susan, laughing; "much he seems to care for it, doesn't he?"

"To be sure he cares for it, and is grateful too, as for certain he ought to be," said Mr. Chesterfield, addressing his daughter-in-law a little with the air of a reprimand. "It is likely enough that there are other things Charles may like better than a journey to London, but that's no reason he shouldn't be thankful for the offer. You'll be proud to dine with Sir George, won't you, my boy?"

"Yes, father," replied the young man, once more colouring to the temples, "I shall like to go."

Having said thus much, Charles attempted no further conversation, and by degrees the spirits of the whole party seemed to flag, despite the determination to be particularly gay and happy which they had expressed to each other a short time before.

"I do believe that we are all tired out with our gladness!" said Bessy, looking anxiously at Charles.

"And that's no way impossible, little one," replied the old man, glad, as it should seem, at having their drooping spirits so satisfactorily accounted for; "so I vote for our all eating our supper and going to bed, without talking any more of our happiness."

CHAPTER IV.

Charles Chesterfield proves himself to be not altogether a Stoic—His Mother alone understands his Feelings—He Dines at the Grange, and his Journey to London is settled—The News is announced to his assembled Family as they sit in their Porch by Moonlight—Leave-taking and Departure.

As the important Saturday was at the distance of four days from that on which the above events occurred, it might seem that there was time enough for the family of Charles to find out what his real sentiments and opinions were respecting the different modes of life which had been suggested to him. Yet it was not so. Throughout the whole of this time his affections were waging perpetual war against his imagination. There were moments when he felt that he hated himself for the species of cold palsy of the heart of which he was conscious; but, comparatively speaking, these moments were but few and far between, for greatly the larger portion of the time was past in a sort of inward ecstasy, during which NOTHING could have had power to compete with the wildly ambitious hopes which filled his soul. Yet common sense had not so utterly forsaken him as not to leave a vague consciousness that to all others, save his inspired self alone, the hopes he was feeding on would seem absurd. He carefully enclosed them therefore in the most secret cells of his heart, and like a miser gloating over his unsunned treasure, or a lover taking stolen glances at the portrait of one beloved in mystery, his emotions were all the stronger for being unwitnessed and unshared.

Every member of his family, and his friendly instructor into the bargain, saw and felt that he was changed, but each one of them had a different theory as to the nature of the change. His father thought that some notion of the chance which had befallen him bringing with it the necessity of giving up his idle habits for a mode of life enforcing greater activity, caused the heaviness that seemed to rest upon his spirits. Christopher thought that he was terrified at the idea of going forth into the world, and that all the peculiarity they witnessed arose from mere shyness, which

would soon wear off. Susan believed that the poor fellow was so overcome by all that had happened to him, as to be positively ill, and, could she have had her way, would have obliged him to swallow sundry drugs to tranquillize his spirits, and set his system "to rights," as she called it. Mr. Westbrook, good man, had no doubt but that the words he had spoken to him, on first hearing of his good fortune, had sunk deep into his heart, and that he was now meditating with all the humility and self-doubtingness which became a christian, on the important subject of ordination. Poor little Bessy, half broken-hearted herself at the sad change which it was easy to see must soon take place in their hitherto happy mode of life, could not persuade herself to doubt that Charles must feel unhappy too, and this accounted very satisfactorily, in her estimation, both for his not liking to go to college, and not looking happy and light-hearted when London was talked of either.

The only individual of the party who had the slightest notion of what was really working within him was his mother; a fact which would have greatly disturbed some of farmer Chesterfield's most carefully drawn conclusions respecting females in general, and his well-beloved wife in particular. But so it was, and the fact is easily explained, by remembering that of all those who sat in judgment on the symptoms he betrayed, she alone had any sympathy with the feeling in which they originated. Mrs. Chesterfield was, in truth, as vain of the intellectual talents of her younger son as he could be himself; her ambition for him was as unbounded, her hopes as extravagant. And though the old woman's substantial imaginings took no form more brilliant, or more fanciful, than that he should receive a prodigious quantity of honour and glory from the great scholars of London, and that, if it was not his own fault he would make a great marriage with some beautiful lady, as rich, or it may be, a great deal richer than himself; still, when she marked his absent eye, and saw him start as one awakened from a dream, when his attention was forcibly called outward from contemplating the gorgeous scenes exhibiting by his fancy within, she guessed, with a very satisfactory approach to the truth, whereabouts his thoughts had been wandering.

The same mother-wit, too, which taught her this, likewise taught her that no good would be done by endeavouring to explain to those who did not understand him, what it was that Charles was thinking about; and, therefore, when any of the family remarked in her presence upon what caused so much speculation, she only shook her head, or shrugged her shoulders, and if she spoke at all, it was only to say "Dear boy!"

Yet, notwithstanding this excellent sympathy between them, Mrs. Chesterfield was not at all aware that, though by day her darling wore an aspect of perfectly inactive meditation, he was during several hours of every night most busily engaged in arranging all his little possessions for leaving his home on the following Monday, in company with Sir George Meddows and his family. Having determined not to declare his resolution of accepting the baronet's invitation till after the visit of Saturday, he steadily kept to it, and thereby lost the essential services of his mother in making his preparations. But his father had dwelt a good deal upon the difficulty of his being ready by this Monday, and likewise on the positive manner in which Sir George had declared that on that day he *must* perforce set off; which so terrified the youth lest his glorious hopes should be frustrated by the necessity of any delay on his part, that all his books, and all his hoarded compositions, all his best apparel, and all the little articles with which he had been indulged in compliance with his literary wishes, such as a writing-desk, portfolio, and so on, were all secretly put in marching order, and perfectly ready to start at an hour's notice. As the young man's personal habits were indolent, and putting things in good order by no means one of his accomplishments, these circumstances, trifling as they are, serve to show the strength of the impulse which inspired him.

Charles had twice before dined at the table of Sir George Meddows; but it was only when he was inhabiting the Grange without the ladies of his family, and when the sole object of the invitation had been to prove to farmer Chesterfield that the prosperity of the country depended upon his giving his vote and interest, at an approaching election, in direct opposition to the manner in which he had been led, by the same patriotic interest, to give it at the last. So that Charles's part in the business had been confined to eating as much fruit, and drinking rather more wine, than he liked: which luxuries were thus liberally bestowed upon him for the purpose of proving Sir George's very strong attachment to the Chesterfield family.

Great, in all ways, was the difference between his former visits and the present one. Instead of being shown into the library on arriving, it was to the drawing-room that his father and himself were led; and though quite as sensible as most other rustic youths to the dazzling effects of a handsome apartment, seen for the first time, Charles had scarcely passed the door before he became aware that sofas and ottomans, mirrors and candelabra, were not of necessity the most imposing objects that a fine drawing-room could contain. Seated on the

same sofa, at the upper end of the apartment, were two ladies, much more decidedly unlike any thing he had ever before looked upon, than any other objects which met his eyes. These ladies were the sister and the daughter of Sir George Meddows. Mrs. Longuéville, the sister, was the widow of a French officer of distinction, who had, however, left her nothing but his name, and the right to claim, as near relations by marriage, many of the old aristocracy of France. Her own fortune of ten thousand pounds had been carefully secured to her by settlement, when their showy, but unprofitable, marriage was formed; and on the interest of this she lived, with the assistance either of Sir George's house for her home, or of such an allowance for receiving his motherless daughter and only child into her family, as had enabled her to support a very tolerable appearance in Paris during the last three or four years, for about six months in each year.

Clara Meddows, her niece, at the age of twenty-two, possessed that perfect and finished air of high fashion which is certainly never acquired *more* thoroughly than by those whom circumstances have thrown into intimate association with the best society in Paris. This young lady's position had moreover given her the advantage of an intimate connection with many of the same distinguished class in England; and, in addition to this, nature had bestowed upon her great personal beauty, to which education had added all the graces which well-taught accomplishments can bestow. The quality of her intellect, and the peculiarities of her temper and disposition, will be more satisfactorily developed by the following narrative, than by description.

There are very many pretty young women of two-and-twenty, who, even when placed by fortune in a situation greatly superior to that of the majority who gaze upon them, inspire more admiration than awe. But unfortunately for Charles, this was not the case with Miss Meddows. Her beauty was of the kind in which the most rustic perceive fashion; the most conceited, superiority; and the most presumptuous, dignity. Tall and perfectly well formed, though, as yet, extremely slight; with a clear brown, but pale, complexion, raven hair, magnificent black eyes, a straight nose, and that short-lipped Grecian mouth which best displays a set of well-ranged pearly teeth, Clara Meddows could no more have been mistaken for a lowly-born or lowly-bred young lady, than a first-rate race-horse for the short-legged round pony that draws to his stable-door the litter of which his bed is made.

Mr. Chesterfield "louted low" to the two ladies, and, Sir George not being in presence, seated himself, without speaking, on the first chair he came to that was set out for use. Charles

stood perfectly still for a minute or two after he entered the room, and then sidled to a window, where, with a sudden feeling of timidity, he confessed to himself that not even the conscious superiority of genius could, at first sight, make a man feel perfectly at ease with persons he was quite unused to. Meanwhile, the two ladies not only bowed very graciously, but the elder one condescended to hope that Mrs. Chesterfield and all the family were in good health, adding, that she perfectly remembered going to drink tea at Maplebury farm when a girl, and recollected quite well Mr. Chesterfield's eldest boy's great good-nature in gathering vast quantities of cowslips, and tying them up in balls for her. This interesting theme lasted till Sir George made his appearance, when the hero of the party was drawn forth from the retreat afforded by the sheltering draperies of the window-curtains, and led by the most condescending good-humour not only to endure the sound of his own voice, but to remember, though at first not very distinctly, why it was that he found himself in that honourable presence.

"My dear Charles! I am delighted to see you!" exclaimed the cordial baronet, shaking his hand for a period unusually long, and gazing in his face the while with a good deal of real as well as of affected interest. "How immensely you are grown since I last saw you! And so wonderfully improved too, Mr. Chesterfield, in all ways. I really wish you joy of your son, quite as much as of his unexpected good fortune."

Mr. Chesterfield smiled, looked greatly pleased, and replied with modest sincerity, that he certainly did think the kind old lady's money might have been worse bestowed.

"Upon my soul, Chesterfield, I should find it difficult to say where it could have been bestowed better. We all know that from his earliest childhood Charles has shown abilities of no common order; but I will cordially confess to you that I did not expect a manner and appearance so perfectly gentlemanlike."

Charles Chesterfield raised his eyes from the ground, and, looking Sir George full in the face, took measure of him in his heart, as the type and model of a man of consummate wisdom and judgment. "While such approve me," thought the young man, "I ought to fear nothing;" and as the cheering idea arose within him, he ventured for the second time since he had entered the room to turn his eyes towards Miss Meddows.

The exceeding beauty which had seemed as it were to startle and almost terrify him at his first glance did not appear diminished at the second; yet there was something in the expression of her features which did not please him. It was not pride; for though no one, not even the uninitiated Charles, could doubt the

power of that lofty brow to dart a glance of very killing scorn, if she so willed, yet the aspect she now wore could not be mistaken for it. She looked annoyed, vexed, and almost sad, but there was no haughtiness.

“There is but one thing wanting,” resumed Sir George, as he and his guests seated themselves; “but one thing wanting, Chesterfield, to make this young man’s good fortune a real blessing to himself and his family. I have not forgotten my offer, nor changed my mind respecting it, and I am quite ready to take him with me to London on Monday. I know all the first literary characters in town; he shall be introduced to them all, and a few months will suffice to settle the question as to whether it will be desirable for him to attempt publishing any thing he has written.”

As these words were spoken, Charles again looked up, and again his eyes rested on the speaking features of Clara. A frown, a positive unmistakeable frown, contracted her beautiful brow, and a movement of the head, so slight as to be observed by none but himself, indicated as plainly as if she had spoken it, that she did not approve the plan.

Here was a mystery which, while it made his cheeks tingle and his heart beat from the fear that it might involve something hostile to his wishes, gave the young lady an interest in his eyes beyond any that beauty could have inspired. It is probable that she observed the intensity of attention with which the young man regarded her, and possibly interpreted with tolerable correctness the feelings which caused his cheeks to glow; for the frown relaxed into a radiant smile, as she met his eye, and she said in the most amiable accent imaginable—“Mr. Charles Chesterfield may find publishers enough in London if he wishes to present himself before the public. There can be no doubt of it. But do you not think, papa, that the cause of literature would be better promoted by his remaining amidst the inspiring scenes where his genius was born? I can hardly imagine any process so likely to destroy the youthful freshness of a poetic mind, as the being dragged from the country to the town.”

“What an extremely pastoral idea, my dear Clara!” replied her father, laughing; “I should scarcely have expected from you any thing so prodigiously sentimental. I am sorry I cannot agree with you, fair daughter; but unless you would seriously recommend to our young friend here the regular pipe and crook vein, and teach him to emulate the immortal Shenstone, I am greatly afraid your advice will contribute more to his oblivion than his fame. Is Miss Meddows right, Charles, in supposing that you are of the Arcadian school?”

“I have written some few lines, sir, after the manner of The-

ocritus," replied the young man, blushing, while a shy smile acted upon one corner of his mouth, and a nervous twitching upon the other; "but I by no means wish to confine myself to this style of composition; on the contrary, I——"

Here the drawing-room door was thrown widely open, and the ever welcome apparition of the nuncio of the sideboard pronounced DINNER in a tone which might have silenced B. himself, though in the very act of giving a catalogue *raisonné* of his productions.

"That's well!—I have ridden twenty miles this morning," said Sir George, giving his arm to his sister, "But please to remember, most erudite Clara," he added, with a laughing nod to his daughter, "that whatever civilities Charles Chesterfield may be inclined to bestow upon the interesting little specimen of our *moutons* which he may find on the table, it is not his intention to devote his life to becoming the chronicler of their exploits in our flowery meads."

At dinner Mr. Chesterfield, senior, sat by the young lady, while his son, the sole occupant of the opposite side of the table, enjoyed the doubtful advantage of having her dark eyes frequently directed towards him. He was not destined, however, to be either charmed or chilled by the expression of her countenance; for Sir George Meddows, always animated at table, seemed determined to devote the lively spirits which rarely failed him there, to the edification and amusement of his *protégé*; and Charles sipped the often-pledged wine, and listened to his lively hope-inspiring host, till a dozen pair of black eyes might have flashed upon him without the slightest danger of his being embarrassed thereby.

It was not often, perhaps, that the eloquence of the father could so completely throw the beauty of the daughter into the shade; but on this occasion the success of Sir George went further still, for it thrust little Bessy as entirely out of the young man's thoughts, as if he had never in his life been awake to meditate upon her soft eyes and gentle smile, and made him feel so thoroughly convinced that he was destined to immortalize himself by his pen, that he would have considered the yielding to any feeling which might have turned him from the pursuit, as a manifest flying in the face of Providence.

"It is in vain, Charles," said the amiable baronet, as he prepared to turn his plate into a miniature laboratory, for the exquisitely delicate chemical process by which he brought his composite fish-sauce to perfection; "it is vain to struggle against nature, when she declares herself so decidedly as she has done in your case. Your mother has explained to me the nature of your talent exactly. It shows itself, does it not, my dear fellow, in a con-

stant propensity to composition? Scribble, scribble, scribble, all day, and then you are happy—that's it—you need not tell me—I have studied man, studied him deeply, Charles, and when any thing so decidedly marked as your talent for writing comes before me, I will defy all the art of man to conceal it from me. Come, confess, I have found you out, haven't I?"

"I cannot deny it, Sir George," replied the blushing tyro; "you know me as well, nay, perhaps better than I do myself. But in truth, I can say, that there is, at least, one thing certain. If I cannot write, Sir George, I can do nothing."

"I know it—I am perfectly convinced of it," replied his eager new friend; "and mark me, Charles, you will find *that* to be the case through life.—Give me a small plate with cucumber, Norman.—You will find through life, that when once a man gives himself up to the divine enchantments of the muse, no matter whether in prose or verse, my dear boy, he never will, nor ever can, be good for any thing else."

"And if he has the happiness to succeed, Sir George," returned the youth, his eye flashing, and his whole countenance glowing with all sorts of inspiration: "if this greatest of all earthly joys be his, can those who love him wish for any thing better? I should be grieved at heart to do any thing that my friends might not approve;" and here Charles gave a furtive glance towards his father, who, however, saw it not, being altogether occupied by eating heartily, and listening, at the same time, to much that Mrs. Longuéville was kind enough to address to him. "I would give up almost any thing rather than vex them; but in this case I am sure it would not answer."

"To be sure it would not—you need not finish—I know perfectly well what you were going to say—it would be your ruin, and their ruin, and every body's ruin—it is not to be thought of for a moment: so, on Monday morning, my dear fellow, I shall contrive a place for you in the carriage, or on the carriage, somewhere or other, and to London you shall go, where my house shall be your home, till you can suit yourself with some snug little lodging near us. And now, take a glass of champagne with me, Charles. The thing is settled, and we will say no more about it till the ladies are gone, and then I will tell your good father that you have given me your answer, and there will be no more difficulties in your way, depend upon it."

Charles took the sparkling draught, and felt as he did so that hope was changed into certainty, that all doubts and fears had turned their backs upon him and fled, and that it would now be his own fault if all the darling dreamy wishes of his ambitious heart were not satisfied.

His father, meanwhile, was undergoing pretty nearly a similar process, by the aid of Mrs. Longuéville's condescending affability. That is to say, she was doing all in her power to comply with the rather pointed request of her brother, that she would not suffer farmer Chesterfield to perceive that she thought him a bore.

"You know, my dear Amelia," he had said to her during a short *tête-à-tête* before they parted to dress for dinner; "you know that it is sometimes in the power of these kind of people to be very useful to one, and neither you nor I are such fools as to quarrel with our bread and butter, even if it should happen to come out of a farm-house. As I think it worth my while to have them dining here, the bore, you know, cannot be altogether escaped, and it will give you no more trouble to be civil than to be rude."

"Say no more, George," replied his accomplished sister; "when people can, will, or may be useful, I have not to learn to-day that it is worth while to be civil to them. Only tell me the proper vein, and the conversation shall not flag. Agriculture? Politics? or Religion? From the dairy to Downing-street—from St. Paul's to St. Peter's—from his own fireside to the castle at Windsor, I will undertake to hold him in discourse till you blow your nose, and flourish your handkerchief according to the law in such cases known and provided."

"Thank you, Amelia," he replied; "I know full well that you can not only do all this, but more too; and therefore on the present occasion, strange as it may seem, I will request you to select literature as your theme. Not that it will be necessary to enter into any critical discussions. Merely tell the old gentleman that there is nothing in our family so greatly valued as literary talent—I will not keep you at it long. The flourish you speak of shall be performed as soon as you have taken your usual quantity of wine."

"Upon this hint she spake,"

and as usual proved herself a most able agent; for, before the signal was given, the old man felt more than half convinced that it would be doing his boy a cruel injury were he to be prevented from cultivating the friendship of a family, whose peculiar fondness for writers would make them so dear and precious to him.

Clara heard all this, but said nothing: for how could she? The party had divided itself into two *tête-à-têtes*, leaving her as completely alone as if she had remained in the drawing-room. But she knew it was her father's intention to take the young legatee with them to London, if he could persuade him to go; and, to say the truth, this was quite sufficient to make her exceedingly desirous that he should remain at home. Yet, on the whole,

though a woman of fashion, Clara was not a bad daughter, being neither particularly self-willed nor ill-tempered; but, nevertheless, there were some subjects upon which herself and father held very different opinions, and it must be confessed that whenever this happened, which was not seldom, the young lady was apt to be as immovable as a rock; though, as all young ladies know, the utmost pertinacity of will cannot always secure a daughter from the necessity of doing many things which she does not like. Neither was Clara fortunate enough to agree much more in opinion with her aunt than with her father; so that had any of her acquaintance happened thoroughly to know her mind, they might have been led to consider her as a person most decidedly addicted to opposition, and that upon pretty nearly every subject of importance which was discussed in her family. This propensity would doubtless have led to great disunion, and much painful disputing among them, had it not been that, with all her faults, both her father and aunt were so devotedly attached to her, as frequently to agree between themselves, that the points upon which they knew her to be most violently prejudiced should be named before her as little as possible. This discreet forbearance was certainly the cause of many things going on peaceably, which might otherwise have met with a deal of troublesome opposition from a person of Clara's uncompromising temper; and, together with her natural proneness to affection, which not even this tough temper could overcome, the trio contrived to live together on more friendly terms than might have been expected between persons of character so essentially opposed.

No sooner had the two ladies reached the drawing-room, where Mrs. Longuéville threw herself at full length upon a sofa, than her niece exclaimed,

“How can you find any amusement, aunt, in talking such exceedingly great nonsense to that poor old man?”

“My dear Clara! you grow more exquisitely polite every day. How can I thank you enough for this charming compliment?”

“I ask for no thanks, dear aunt, nor have you any right to be angry; because I so well remember hearing you very eloquently saying exactly the reverse of all I have heard you utter to-day. Do you remember the last time Mr. Dalrymple dined with us before we left town? Do you remember the manner in which you received his offered introduction of Mr. Holmes?”

“Nonsense, Clara! considering that you are really a very clever girl, it is astonishing how often you talk of things that you know nothing about. For pity's sake, let me have no more of good farmer Chesterfield. I am sick of him; ‘Bid me discourse’ of any thing that either London or Paris can offer of legitimate

interest for a woman of fashion, I shall be willing to oblige you ; but no more of farmer Chesterfield if you love me."

"And yet, my dear aunt, all you have been doing and saying for the last hour is precisely calculated to bring the Chesterfield race upon you to perpetuity. Know you not, that papa has conceived the project of taking the young man to London with him?"

"Well, my dear, and very good-natured of him, too. What *can* you find to say against such an action as that?"

"I shall find very little to say against it," said Clara, colouring. "But considering the annoyance you have just expressed from the necessity of conversing with the father, I should have imagined that you might have felt some distaste at the idea of being domesticated with the son."

"Not the least to the purpose, my dear, which I grieve to say is not unfrequently the case with your observations. But come, Clara, I will be sincere with you, and confess that I think I comprehend what you would be at. You are thinking of Dalrymple, my poor love ; and you fear lest he should be displeased at seeing so very well-looking a youth as this rustic permitted to run tame in Bruton-street.

"But here you are wrong, too, my poor Clara ! For if you are pertinaciously determined not to marry without being what you call mutually attached, and if the only man you have a fancy for evidently does not care a farthing for you—though beyond all contradiction you have been for the last two years the handsomest unmarried woman in London—the way to rouse him from his indifference is not to humour all his fancies as you do, but to pique him by a good strong fit of jealousy. I have no doubt you are right in supposing that he would think such a hanger-on as your father proposes to make of this unfledged young poet a prodigious impropriety ; and for that very reason you ought to patronize the scheme above all things."

Whether it was Miss Meddows's habitual propensity to differ from her aunt, or any other cause, which made these words obnoxious to her, it is difficult to say ; but certain it is that they were so ; for not only did she colour and turn her lofty head away with marked displeasure, but her nether lip trembled, and her dark eyes, though no tears escaped them, shone like diamonds sprinkled with dew. After the pause of a moment, however, she replied with gentleness, yet with some touch of her usual firmness too,

"You will oblige me, aunt Longuéville, by never again mentioning Mr. Dalrymple as being more or other to me than an old acquaintance and my father's ward. He neither is, nor ever can be, any thing more."

“Very well, my dear; and now we will have some coffee.”

The trio they had left in the dining-room soon joined them; and no one who knew Sir George could doubt for a moment, that whatever his object had been in inviting his rustic neighbours, it had answered, for he entered laughing, and with every appearance of the most perfect good humour.

“You are no whist-player, I suppose, Chesterfield,” said he, rather amused, as it should seem, by his own suggestion; for his eyes expressed the sort of covert merriment which is so often seen to be enjoyed by those who love to quiz quietly and without committing themselves by saying a word about it.

“No, sir; at least, not in such a presence,” was old Chesterfield’s grave reply.

“Then I think, Clara, you must give us a song—something English, of course, you know. You mean, Chesterfield, to give us the pleasure of your company to tea?”

As this was said in a voice that expressed a doubt, to say the least of it, the observant old man replied,

“No, Sir George; many thanks: but the sooner we get home with our news the better. So, when I have indulged with another cup of this fine coffee, we will wish you good night.”

“Ay, ay, I understand. Your good wife will like to set about her preparations without loss of time: and egad, Charles, we have not given her too much, have we? Give her my best respects, and tell her that all she leaves undone for want of longer notice we will take care to supply in London.” Then drawing the old man aside, the kind and thoughtful baronet said to him in a whisper, “Of course, you will take up this legacy, my good friend, without loss of time. I hope the good lad will be careful, and contrive to live upon the interest till he can increase his means by the help of his pen. Unluckily, government interest is dreadfully low just now; but till he comes of age, poor fellow, he can do no better, I am afraid—unless, indeed, his guardians—By the by, Chesterfield, I think you told me you were his only guardian?”

“Yes, Sir George, I am his only guardian.”

“So much the better, my good friend, so much the better. It may spare you a monstrous deal of trouble. However, for the present, you can do nothing, I suppose, but put it into our detestable three-and-a-half per cent stocks. Depend upon it, I shall immediately make it my business to see if he cannot at once dispose of some of his compositions to advantage; and meantime, Chesterfield, you must not send him up quite penniless, poor fellow! It is impossible to do without a few shillings and sixpences in London.”

"I suppose so, Sir George," replied the tranquil-spirited farmer, smiling complacently. "But you know, sir, it will be easy enough to have our Charles back again, if he finds out that his money goes faster than is convenient. As long as the old roof stands, there is no fear of his wanting board and lodging, and when that's come by easy, there can be no great danger of serious trouble. Besides, Sir George, you will find no great deal to do for keeping him steady. There never was a lad had less fancy for spending than Charles, except indeed for buying books—but at any rate he'll have enough for that now."

"Oh, yes! we will hope so. And you will take care, will you, that he is garnished with a trifle for starting? Of course, you will get the principal immediately, and I'll engage for it that my friend Charles will not bring you to a very severe account next Christmas, if you do dip into it for what will be necessary to fit him out just at first."

"No fear of that, Sir George, between my boy and me. It is lucky enough that he has had that new suit of broad-cloth just brought home, which is as good as Gloucester can furnish; and that's the staple commodity, as we say, of a man's wardrobe at all times. And as to all other things, his mother is sure to let him have enough."

An amiable smile, full of mockery, again adorned the handsome mouth of Sir George, as he listened; but he only said, as he gave his estimable neighbour a farewell shake of the hand, "Every thing will be quite as it should be, I have no manner of doubt, and whatever is absolutely necessary to supply the inevitable difference between London and the country, so sensible a man as yourself will not refuse to supply."

The whispering conversation was then broken up; the young man rose from the chair he had silently occupied while it lasted; Mrs. Longuéville bowed a farewell, which would have been perfect in its smiling kindness, had she not yawned in the midst of it; Miss Meddows uttered a simple, and, as it seemed to Charles, a very proud "good night;" and Sir George, once more frankly extending his ready hands to both his guests at once, "good by"-ed them off; and then, almost before the door was fully closed after them, rang the bell, that a card-table might be set for his sister and himself to play *écarté*.

Neither the father nor son greatly enjoyed their homeward walk together. The old man's heart was full; and as he thought how doubtful it was whether he should ever take another walk with him by the pale pure light of the moon, feeling as certain as he then did that the heart and conscience of his darling boy was as free from sin as he believed them now, he dared not speak lest

his voice should betray that he was weeping. And Charles, though assuredly no such doubts and fears interfered to destroy the charm of that sweet tranquil hour, was, nevertheless, incapable of enjoying it, because his conscience reproached him for feeling that had he been alone he should have enjoyed it more.

At length the old man broke the silence which had hitherto been interrupted only by the even sound of their own feet-falls, and the trilling notes of a far-off nightingale, and gently began to perform the often-repeated part of Polonius to his departing son. The young man listened as a young man ought, in perfect silence, and if any of the excellent precepts he then received were doomed to be forgotten, it certainly was not because the circumstances under which he heard them were such as to render attention difficult.

Capricious April sometimes gives us hours of such gentle temperature, that they beguile us into thinking, not only that spring, but summer itself has come. And so it was on the evening that Charles and his father came sauntering home, between eight and nine o'clock, from their dinner at the Grange.

One of the prettiest features of the venerable mansion of Maplesbury was its Gothic porch. Throughout the summer and autumn its atmosphere was redolent of the perfume of successive honeysuckles; the sweet climatis followed, nor breathed its last delicious sigh till the very sternest frown of winter had banished all such holiday decorations from the earth. And now, unnumbered violets, with here and there a shy white blossom peeping out to meet the glances of the moon, spread themselves, as if conscious of safety, within and without, till the rich air seemed a treasury of their breath. It was here that the father and son found the three females of the family seated, wrapped in their almost needless shawls, and gossiping in the steady moonlight which fell full upon them, while Christopher and his dog were busy at the sheep-fold, where they were lovingly assisting each other in the operation of enclosing some scores of fleecy mothers, with their bleating young ones, for the night.

"So soon returned, father?" exclaimed Susan, who, from her position, was the first to see them as they approached. "I did not think it was possible to dine with such very fine folks, and get away by this time."

"And if we had been very fine folks ourselves, Susan, it is likely enough you would have been right; but we staid long enough to do the business we went for, and I had no mind to be troublesome," replied Mr. Chesterfield.

Bessy almost ceased to breathe in her eagerness to hear what

she knew must follow, namely, the to go, or not to go, upon which her hope and terror hung; but the old man seemed in no haste to tell his news, for, instead of saying what they were all expecting to hear, he made a sign to Susan and her niece to make room for him between them, Charles having already slid into the corner next his mother.

"What a night to be sure!" said the farmer, turning up his face to the heavens, and taking off his hat as if in reverence of all the glory he saw there.

"A very fine night, Thomas, no doubt of it," returned his wife, rather ironically; "but it would be a deal more to the purpose if you'd be pleased to tell us all that has happened, and all that is going to happen, about Charles."

"And that's true, wife, and no denying it," said the good man, replacing his hat, and folding his arms as if settling himself for a discourse of some length. "But, to confess the real state of the case, I don't like my news well enough to be over fond of telling it."

"Why, to be sure, Sir George did not go off from it after all? Did he, Thomas Chesterfield?"

"No, Dorcas, no. Nothing of that kind is to be laid to his charge; on the contrary, he seemed more eager than ever, I thought, to do all he promised, and more too. But spite of all that, Dorcas, my heart is heavy when I think of our dear boy's leaving us."

"Nonsense! nonsense! Thomas; we must not be faint-hearted at the very moment when we have got the best reason in the world to fall down upon our knees and sing 'Oh be joyful!' Is it all settled, husband? That's the point."

"Yes, my dear, it is all settled, and Charles is to be up at the Grange by nine o'clock on Monday morning, that he may be ready to start with them."

"Thank God! that's all right; and now my heart's at ease, I shall be able to set about getting the dear fellow ready," was Mrs. Chesterfield's reply to this decisive bit of information. She spoke this in a voice so loudly gay, that a soft sad sigh, breathed from the opposite side of the porch, was heard by no one. But the minute afterwards Bessy rose abruptly from her seat, and darted out alone into the broad moonlight. Charles saw her go—he saw, too, that she hung her head, and moved with a rapid and unsteady step, that was neither quite running nor quite walking, into the deep shade of the orchard upon which a little wicket opened on the right-hand side of the fore-court. He saw it, and he knew why she went as well as if he had been walking by her side, and heard her say,

“Dear, dear Charles is going then! I cannot stay and hear them talk about it.”

For a moment he felt as if he would have given his right hand to have gone after her, to have taken her in his arms, and to have looked at her sweet eyes in the moonshine, as he swore to her by its soft still-returning light, that his absence, like its own, should only be for a season, and that he too would return again to shine with a gentle radiance upon the path that thenceforward they should pursue together! The youth smiled as the *conchetto* suggested itself, and he thought he could put it prettily enough into rhyme. And then he thought that the image, though really fanciful, was very far from just, for that, if it were the will of Heaven he should shine at all, it would be by no borrowed light. And then away galloped *la folle de logis*, as our neighbours cleverly call each man's particular whim (a much more significant phrase, by the by, than our vague term imagination), away galloped *la folle de logis*, and presently bore him high and dry beyond the reach of all common-place ordinary human feeling, into the empyrean realms of everlasting fame. Then, very naturally, he lost sight of Bessy, who was sitting the while on a low seat of turf, which he had raised for himself and for her, some three years before, with innumerable clusters of apple-blossoms over her head, and a hearty shower of tears falling into her bosom.

But he was more quickly called back to the companionship of the little party in the porch, distant as was the point to which his *escapade* had borne him, than she; for whereas within five minutes after Bessy ran away, Charles found himself *tête-à-tête* with his mother in his bedroom, body and soul engaged in folding, and packing, and pressing, and all the other very earthly occupations required by the preparations for a journey, she was still sitting quietly alone in the moonlight, building castles in the air for her dear Charles, and drying her tears as she remembered how very selfish it was to feel sorry because he was going where he wished to go. How it came to pass that he *could* wish it was a great mystery to her; and her wisdom could suggest no better reason for it than that it was because he was a man.

“Yes! that must be it,” she murmured, fixing her eyes upon the bright distant stars. “I do believe that men love difficulties, and dangers, and wandering. If there was but a ladder to those beautiful stars I do believe that Charles would like to climb it! And it would be very mean and selfish in me to wish to stop him. I don't wish it—I won't wish it. All I *do* wish is, that he should be good and happy!”

And having enjoyed this sort of monologue for nearly an hour, she made her way round the house, and through the

kitchen, into her own room, where her aunt soon after entered to give her the accustomed maternal kiss, and wish her good night. Whether Mrs. Christopher had at this time any hope or any fear that some feeling more tender than even sisterly affection was warming itself into life within the heart of little Bessy, may be doubted. But if any such idea had suggested itself to her, it was more than had happened to the innocent girl herself, who, while looking forward to the hours of solitude she might be able to steal for thinking of Charles, as the only great enjoyment she anticipated till his return, had no more suspicion that she was IN LOVE than she had five years before, when at the age of eleven she had received from him a little writing-desk, as a reward for having profited so rapidly by his writing-lessons. She had loved him dearly then, and she loved him dearly now.

The Sunday passed in its usual sober and orderly manner, an hour being spared by the kind-hearted Mr. Westbrook from the duties of the day for the purpose of giving some very excellent parting advice to his much-loved pupil. All the counsels that tender affection could suggest to ensure his happiness were also uttered to his somewhat unapt ears at home, till at length the moment arrived at which he was to set off in the venerable one-horse chaise that was to convey his luggage to the Grange.

Even to Charles it was not a moment of unmixed pleasure. He felt that he was leaving hearts which loved him dearly; and when, profiting by the privileged moment, he took Bessy in his arms, and pressed his lips upon her brow, he certainly did feel a pang that while it lasted made him a little doubt the perfection of the happiness he was about to enjoy. "Pretty gentle creature!" he murmured inwardly, "shall I ever find another that I could love so well?"

"Charles! Charles! for goodness sake don't stand there in that way! You will keep them all waiting, you will indeed," cried his mother, very earnestly. "There, your father is got into the chaise, and every earthly thing is as ready as we can make it. Come, dear! Come!"

Charles prepared to obey, and having once more said farewell to all the rest, turned, ere he sprung into the chaise, to give one parting glance to Bessy; but she was no longer in sight.

Though the carriage road was nearly three times as long as the footpath, farmer Chesterfield got over the ground in excellent time. The baronet's carriage was in the very act of driving round to the door, and every thing obliging and proper was said on all sides. The old man then wrung his boy's hand, and with a swelling heart drove home again; while the youth, exhilarated by the busy note of preparation which on all sides sounded in

his ears, soon forgot every thing but that there was “*un voyage à faire, et LONDRES au bout.*”

In a few minutes he was seated aloft in the front dickey, beside the butler. Had he been placed on a golden throne, beside a king, his heart could hardly have bounded more triumphantly. “All right,” resounded from behind, the postilions cracked their whips, and Charles Chesterfield felt in every nerve that he was galloping post-haste towards London.

CHAPTER V.

A London Interpretation of a Country Invitation—Sir George gives a slight Sketch of himself to his *Protégé*—Charles Chesterfield makes a new Acquaintance, and finds himself in the way to make others—His great delight thereat.

SIR GEORGE MEDDOWS’S house in Bruton-street was not a very large one; and unless Charles Chesterfield could have been accommodated in the stable, where out of four stalls one was vacant, it would have been quite impossible to assign him any sleeping accommodation on the premises. This fact had doubtless escaped the recollection of Sir George when he invited the young man as a domestic guest; but it must have occurred to him *en route*, as almost the first words he addressed to him, after they were seated at their late dinner, were—drawing out his watch as he spoke,

“Egad, Charles, we must send and see about a lodging for you. It is getting confoundedly late.”

It might be that Charles was a little surprised at this; but he uttered nothing in reply beyond a meek “thank you, sir;” and, before the cloth was withdrawn, had very satisfactorily reasoned himself into the conviction that his good father had mistaken the terms of the invitation, and that he himself, misled by his erroneous representation of it, had stupidly enough misconceived the phrase by which his kind and hospitable patron had signified his condescending wish of seeing him constantly at his table. As soon, therefore, as the weary Mrs. Longuéville and the sombre-looking Clara had quitted the table, Charles very judiciously renewed the subject by saying,

“Will you have the kindness, Sir George, to let one of your servants go with me to look for a lodging? I am afraid I should feel rather at a loss if I undertook the business by myself.”

By no means displeased by this address, which seemed to promise that he should have less trouble with the young rustic, whom for sundry clever reasons he had taken possession of, than he expected, Sir George replied with very cordial good-humour,

“Quite right, my good-fellow! William shall go with you as soon as you have had another glass of wine. I mean to be very strict with you about wine, Charles—I am on honour with your excellent father about keeping you steady in all ways. And, to tell you the truth, it is just as well for many reasons, that you should be cautious about drinking; for such wines as I give are enormously expensive, and, rich as I am, Charles, I keep all my expenses in the most perfect order; for without this, the revenue of an emperor would not enable me to indulge myself by doing a generous thing whenever my heart prompted me to it. You don’t know me yet, Chesterfield; but when you do, you will find that my character is perhaps more remarkable for a nicely-regulated balance between generosity and economy, than for any other trait whatever.”

“I can conceive nothing more noble than a mind so constituted!” replied Charles with enthusiasm. “These two qualities, if well counterpoised, most surely produce a character and conduct as near perfection as it is possible for a human being to approach!”

This was uttered with a sort of eloquent boldness which the young man was almost himself surprised at, till he recollected that, upon a mind like his, strong feelings of all kinds will ever act like inspiration; and when he cast down his eyes as he ceased, it was with the flashing consciousness that he had spoken like a poet. Perhaps Sir George also thought he spoke like a poet; but at any rate the manner pleased him, for he replied,

“You judge me, Charles, as I deserve; and I will own to you, that I love you the better for it. Never restrain your feelings, my dear fellow, when you speak of me. My purpose is to treat you with the affection of a father; and if I find an answering warmth of affection on your part, the union between us will be a happy one for both parties.”

Young Chesterfield fervently pressed his hands upon his heart, and exclaimed,

“For me—for me, Sir George, its happiness must indeed be greater than any gratitude can repay!”

“Say no more, Charles! I understand you perfectly, and know exactly all you feel! And now, my dear boy, be off. I spoke a word to William before dinner—I never forget those I love, Charles. And when he has introduced you to the house I mentioned, it may be as well, I think, that you should offer to pay a month’s rent for the rooms beforehand. Those sort of people always like it best. I have told William that you will want a couple of rooms, for, in point of fact, Charles, it would be utterly impossible for you to do any thing in the way of composition, unless you had a quiet little snuggerly of your own.

You will always find me as thoughtful about your comforts as about your interests. By the way, my dear fellow, how much money did your good old father send you off with?"

"He gave me ten pounds, Sir George," replied young Chesterfield, not without some little feeling of filial pride, while stating the liberality of his parent. But Sir George whistled a sort of quizzing whistle, which, though not fully understood by his companion, raised doubts in his mind as to whether he had been right in his own estimate of the donation.

"Your good father does not quite understand what it is to start for a London race, Charles," said the baronet. "However, we must manage it somehow or other. If the old gentleman objects to letting you have a little of your own money to make a start with, I must look about, and see if I can't find means for you to borrow a hundred or two, at a tolerably christian-like interest. There, I have nothing further to say to you just at present, so now you may go, and you will come back to tea, you know. Yet, stay an instant, Charles—it is better that I should change your ten-pound note for you than the people at the lodgings. That sort of gentry are always so puzzle-headed, that ten to one they will make some blunder. Is it Bank of England, Charles?"

"Yes, Sir George;" and the young man placed the note before his thoughtful friend.

"Quite right! Now then—one, two," and nine fair sovereigns were spread upon the table. "I must give you the rest in silver, Charles, for I have no more gold in my purse;" and thereupon the baronet counted out twelve splendid shillings and a sixpence. "'Faith, you have got my last penny now," he said, laughing gaily; "so for just seven and sixpence you must trust me."

Charles declared himself greatly obliged by this thoughtful kindness, and then set off with the footman for South Molton-street, where a small back-parlour, and the attic which crowned it at the distance of three storeys, were speedily secured for him at a pound a-week. The bargain being made, and William having carefully stipulated for boot-cleaning and clothes-brushing, Chesterfield drew forth his purse, and, in conformity to his patron's advice, laid four of his sovereigns upon the table.

"For a month, sir?" said the woman.

"Yes, ma'am, for a month."

"For a month, *certain*," interposed William. "But if you make the young gentleman comfortable, it is likely he may bide lots of time longer than that."

This important transaction being finished, Charles and his obliging attendant set off again to Bruton-street.

“I hope you will be pleased to remember me, sir, for the good turn I have done you,” said the footman.

“I shall, indeed, William,” replied Chesterfield, with great simplicity. For a minute or two the man kept up at about half a step behind him, expecting the result of this promise; but as nothing followed it, he touched the young gentleman’s elbow rather familiarly, and said, laughingly,

“Come, come, Mr. Chesterfield, you must not come over me that way neither. Master has been giving you a lesson, sir, haven’t he? But that isn’t fair in a gentleman like you, just come fresh into a fine fortune, as they say—that’s different, you know, sir, from what it is with us; so I hope you’ll be pleased not to put me off with promises.”

“Indeed I don’t mean to put you off, William; but what is it you expect of me?”

“Why, you can’t think half-a-crown too much, sir, especially if I’m to call a cab to take you and your boxes at night.”

Charles gave the demanded half-crown, and the footman not only touched his hat, but dropped into the rear, proving thereby that he was an honest man, ready and willing to return payment for value received.

“Ah! Chesterfield! just five minutes too late for coffee, my fine fellow!” said Sir George Meddows, in his most frank and friendly manner, as his *protégé* entered the drawing-room. “But I take it that you are not so much used to it as to miss it greatly—and Clara will give you some tea by and by.”

Miss Meddows had sat silent and sad-looking during dinner, which, when remarked upon by her father, was accounted for by her saying that the journey had fatigued her; she now, however, exerted herself sufficiently to ring the bell, and, having done so, walked immediately to the other end of the room, so that when a servant entered she was so near the door, as to give him an order unheard by the rest of the party, and then passed by him and left the room.

Ere she returned to it, a cup of coffee had been brought to Charles, who took it in the belief that he owed it to the attention of the servant.

“I shall go to the club presently, but it is rather early yet,” said Sir George to his sister; “Do you feel up to a little *écarté*, Amelia?”

“I am fit for nothing else,” replied the lady. “But you will win all my shillings, Sir George; for I am too tired to know what I am about.”

The card-table was set, and the unwearying pair renewed their nocturnal occupation with as much relish as if they had not

done the same thing many thousand times before. Charles meanwhile placed himself in a deep arm-chair near the fire, and would certainly have been asleep in a minute or two, had not his patron aroused him by saying,

“You will always find books, Charles, whenever you happen to spend your evenings here, by just looking about a little in the back drawing-room.”

Whether bookishly disposed at that moment or not, the young man rose, as in duty bound, to look about a little; but there were no lights in the back drawing-room, and therefore, in order to do as he was bid, Charles took one from a table near him.

“Pray take care of the carpet, Mr. Chesterfield!” said Mrs. Longuéville, rather fretfully. “Perhaps you do not burn wax constantly at Maplebury, and you have no idea how infinitely more destructive it is than—than any thing else. It is very odd, George,” continued she, laughing languidly; “but it is a positive fact that I *cannot* pronounce that word!”

“Game!” exclaimed Sir George, as he turned the king in dealing. “What word, Amelia? What are you talking about?”

“Upon my honour, I believe I have lost the game by my care of your carpets!” she replied. “But I know that such a lad as that,” she added, lowering her voice, “never does carry a wax-candle without letting it overflow as he walks along.”

“Very likely, sister,” replied the baronet, in the same subdued voice, “and lecture him about it as much as you like, only do it so as not to affront him, remember. I am quite determined to set him going as an author—there is nothing like it nowadays, positively nothing, when a man has a powerful friend or two to puff him; and observe, Amelia, I promise myself considerable pleasure and amusement from pushing him forward, and making him a little acquainted with the world. This, of course, will cost him a few of the hundreds he has become possessed of so strangely: but I know he cannot spend them better—it is the only way, eventually, to make his fortune. Of course, you understand this sort of thing, Amelia, as well as I do; and if you find it necessary to keep him in order, let it be done civilly and coaxingly. You understand me?”

“A few hundreds?” repeated Mrs. Longuéville, interrogatively; and then added, “I am sure, dear George, I shall always feel a pleasure in being kind to any *protégé* of yours.”

By this time Chesterfield had completed his looking about, and having found, amidst a prodigious collection of annuals, a volume of Spenser, he ventured to select it, even though it had “*Clara Meddows*” inscribed in fair characters on the title-page. But hardly had he settled himself in his luxurious seat, and

indulged for a moment the consciousness of being very comfortable, when the drawing-room door was thrown open, and the name of Mr. Dalrymple announced.

Not having yet made that acquaintance with the world which was to cost him the few hundreds Sir George talked about, it appeared to him quite impossible to pursue his occupation in the presence of this stranger, and having accordingly laid his book aside, he had recourse to the only amusement left him, namely, examining the person, and observing the manners of this new specimen of the fashionable world; for that he was of the class so denominated, Charles, notwithstanding all his rustic ignorance, felt instantly convinced.

But as Mr. Dalrymple is destined to be of some importance in the narrative before us, the reader shall be put a little more *au fait* of his peculiarities and position than Charles, with all his acuteness, was capable of becoming at that time.

Arthur Dalrymple was a young man not quite twenty-six years of age, but with a character much more formed than is usually found so early in life. Accident had contributed to this as well as nature; for he had been early placed in circumstances that enforced the necessity both of thought and action. Though born heir to a large fortune, and coming to the possession of it at an early age, he had passed some years of his life under great embarrassment, or, more properly speaking, under the necessity of witnessing the overwhelming embarrassments of his father. It has often been said, that a warning is better than an example; and in no instance could this appear to be more decidedly the truth than in the case of young Dalrymple. Both his father and grandfather had passed their lives in as great and reckless extravagance as a property, entailed with peculiar strictness, would permit; and during the last three years of his father's life, the young man had been a sharer in many very painful scenes. Placed at Eton and at Oxford by his grandfather (who survived his father by a few months), his scholastic education had been particularly well attended to, though his holidays the while were spent sometimes with his grandfather in London, and sometimes with his father at Brussels, in a manner very little calculated to make him consider learning as the one thing needful to man, whatever it might be to a boy. But, luckily for him, his holidays were not happy holidays; and all things that surrounded him during these intervals were wonderfully soon valued at their worth. His mother had been too long dead for him to remember her. His grandfather was that most detestable of all human varieties, an aged man, addicted wholly and solely to worldly pleasure; and his father, the contemptible victim of the most

unprincipled self-gratification, was banished from his country because his allowance of twelve hundred a-year did not enable him to live in it. Having been indulged in every conceivable whim till twenty-one, he was from that time to the hour of his death continually engaged in acrimonious, and generally vain, struggles with his father for the means of indulging the vices which he had almost systematically been taught. He had married early a pretty English girl whom he met at Florence, and who brought him a few thousands, which, in consequence of the old gentleman's consenting to a life settlement on the estate, had been placed without restraint in the hands of her husband, and she had the great good fortune not to survive their expenditure. The little Arthur, the only fruit of this union, had been educated, as before mentioned, at the expense of his grandfather, who agreed to undertake it, on condition that the system pursued should be dictated by himself. To this the gay young father made not the slightest objection; and the old man, having convinced himself by experience that it did not always answer to bring up a child exactly in the way he should go, determined that the young heir should have the education of an ordinary English gentleman, as he was pleased to express it, and trust to his own good taste, aristocratic descent, and ample fortune, for the making a man of fashion of him afterwards.

The result of this was not exactly what the old gentleman either wished or expected. His grandson indeed became a scholar; and it could hardly be denied that, in all points of comparison with *ordinary* English gentlemen, he was rather above than below the average standard. But in almost all the requisites of a *man of fashion*, in the sense given to the phrase by his two immediate progenitors, he was remarkably deficient. His father had been used to boast that he had carefully abstained from contracting a second marriage, from consideration for the interest and the feelings of his son; but this devotion to him never appeared to be very highly appreciated by the young Arthur, who in truth, would greatly have preferred finding a well-conducted English mother-in-law presiding over the paternal household, to the highly-rouged Walloon lady, who condescended to officiate with brevet rank as mistress of the house. The boy had formed intimacies with one or two lads at Eton, which had ripened into friendship at college; and having in the thoroughly English homes of these boys learned the genuine national manners of his countrywomen, most bitter to his feelings was the contrast presented by the females he encountered at his home. His father had some musical taste, and affected more; the woman he had selected for his companion shared this taste

with him, and her friends and acquaintance were all of the same warbling clique, most of them having second-rate professional engagements at the Opera. Had this set been encountered any where but at his home, his only natural home, Arthur would have passed out from among them with distaste, but they would have produced no lasting effect of any kind upon his mind. As it was, the gay thoughtless season of youth became to him a period of melancholy musing. His heart was not indeed withered, but it was unnaturally compressed, if the phrase may be allowed; for though none of its sensibilities were extinguished, there was little outward sign left that they still existed. In addition to this deep cause of sorrow he had to endure, from the time he quitted college to that of his father's death, the wretched spectacle of an expenditure eternally exceeding the means that were to supply it; and all the miserable tricks by which a household, constituted like that of his father, contrives to ensure the luxuries of the table and the toilet, in despite of failing credit and exhausted means.

At length this most unhappy portion of his existence was brought to a close. His father died at the age of forty-five, and the young man was summoned to the London house of his grandfather. But there no peace awaited him. Bills from every imaginable species of tradesmen, from the wealthiest wine-merchant to the poorest little vendor of potatoes, followed him by dozens, and obliged him from a sense of honour to persecute the old man with petitions for pecuniary aid, though the doing so brought a feeling of degradation with it, which no motive less powerful could have enabled him to endure. But he believed it to be his duty to see these people paid; and by dint of perseverance, most harassing to the old man, and productive to himself of feelings little short of torture, he achieved it.

During the few months which elapsed before the old gentleman followed his son to the grave, he made an entirely new will, in the preamble to which he stated, that, as his grandson and only heir had never, since taking up his final residence beneath his roof, permitted a single day to pass without persecuting him for money, he had come to the resolution of placing all his personalities in trust, till the improvident young man should have attained the age and the wisdom of twenty-six years. The law, declaring him to be a major at twenty-one, would at his death invest him with a life interest in all his estates; but the personalities, which were large, consisting of a magnificent service of plate, many paintings of first-rate excellence, his house in Portman-square, with all its splendid furniture, and moreover whatever money he might leave at his banker's, over and above the expenses of his own funeral, and the discharge of his own debts,

he left to his dear friend, Sir George Meddows, in trust for his grandson, Arthur Dalrymple, to be paid over, and delivered into his hands as soon as he should have attained his twenty-sixth birthday, and not before.

This somewhat absurd restriction was productive of neither inconvenience nor mortification of any kind to Arthur Dalrymple. He felt not the slightest inclination to inhabit his fine house ; neither did he wish to dismantle it ; so that the sort of ostentatious care which his guardian (as Sir George liked to call himself) bestowed upon keeping it scrupulously and accurately in order, was precisely what he most desired respecting this portion of his large property.

The old man, in fact, left no debts, having for the last three years of his life taken a fancy rather to save than to spend his money ; and as he chanced to die precisely one fortnight after receiving his rents, the sum left at his banker's was considerable. Of this Mr. Dalrymple requested a few hundreds, either as an allowance or a loan, a request which was immediately complied with, the form of a loan being preferred by Sir George, inasmuch as the whimsical will of his old friend vested in him no power of making an allowance.

No transaction could pass off in a more easy, pleasant, and friendly way, and the acquaintance of long standing which existed between the parties was naturally increased into intimacy by it.

Dalrymple was now within three months of his second majority. A considerable portion of the two last years he had passed at his place in Herefordshire, and during six weeks of grouse-shooting, he had made his home in a very remote old place in Scotland, which, though a proud domain, from the length of time it had been in the family, had rarely of late years boasted the presence of any master but the bailiff. When in London, Mr. Dalrymple inhabited chambers in the Albany, and it would perhaps have been difficult to find any other man in Europe, possessed of seven thousand a-year, and without a particle of parsimony in his disposition, who lived in a manner so perfectly simple and unostentatious.

Had Mr. Dalrymple been asked by Edward Groves, an old school-fellow, and his only very intimate friend, why he so frequently spent a part of his evening in Sir George Meddows's drawing-room, he would probably have replied, that it was because he was his guardian. Had he (which he never did) asked himself, it is extremely probable that the question would, from the difficulty of finding a satisfactory answer to it, have been sufficient to cure him of the habit altogether. No such questionings, however, had taken place, and accordingly he entered, as usual, a

little before the tea made its appearance, and inquired in a friendly manner for the health of the family after their short absence.

Not even the very critical moment of a deal, when each party counted four, could suffice to restrain the ever new delight which Sir George Meddows invariably manifested at the sight of his ward.

“Arthur!” he exclaimed, quite sentimentally, “you knew we were thinking of you, wishing for you! Yes, we are all well, my dear fellow, and the country is vastly blossoming and beautiful—but neither apple-trees nor cowslips can make up for what one loses by leaving town, as long as it contains the friends we love the best. Amelia, you owe me five shillings—let us give up this game—we are neck-and-neck, you know; or leave the cards, if you will, just as they are—Clara will be here to make tea for us presently, and then we may finish the game. My dear Dalrymple!” added the amiable baronet, rising, “you must let me introduce to you a young *protégé* of mine, for whom I am greatly interested. He is the son of one of my tenants.” He continued, correcting himself as he caught the eye of Charles, “Mr. Chesterfield, the father of this young man, farms his own land, and is a near and excellent neighbour of mine. My friend Charles, here, is a vowed servant to the nine immortal ladies, whose society, I am sorry to say, I have too often quitted for that of the four aces. But you, Arthur, have no such sins on your conscience, and I hope, therefore, that you will extend a friendly hand to this young poet.”

Mr. Dalrymple did extend a hand, and greeted the blushing youth with a good-humoured smile.

“Have you ever published yet, Mr. Chesterfield?” said he.

“That’s the very point, Arthur, on which I want to consult you,” said Sir George, without waiting for the young man’s reply. “I know you are acquainted with whole legions of blue people, male and female, and I shall consider it as a great personal kindness if you will get my young friend set going amongst them.”

“I rather fear, Sir George, that you overrate my influence, but I should have great pleasure in being useful to any young man so circumstanced. Have you written much, Mr. Chesterfield?”

“Immensely!” again answered Sir George for him; while Charles, colouring up to the eyes both with eagerness and shyness, inspired a greater feeling of interest, perhaps, under this enforced silence, than he could have done by words, had he been permitted to utter them.

“The poor fellow is in danger of being stifled by this affectionate patronage,” thought Dalrymple; “it will be true charity

to withdraw him a little from such excess of zeal—Miss Meddows may be able to tell me better what he is.”

The young lady entered at the same moment ; and had not Charles been too much agitated, and too much occupied by the consciousness of having just heard himself proclaimed a poet, he might have found subject for consolation under the coldness of Miss Meddows towards himself, by observing that she was colder still to the elegant and dignified-looking Mr. Dalrymple. But he had no leisure for such observations ; he was tingling in every vein beneath this dawning of celebrity, and running over in his memory all his favourite compositions, preparatory to the selection he would now be so soon called upon to make for the inspection of Mr. Dalrymple and his literary friends.

Clara, meanwhile, with the deliberate and stately step of one who sees not any object which might justify an acceleration of movement, approached the fire-place, round which her father, Mr. Dalrymple, and Charles were standing. The newly-arrived guest stepped forward for the distance of about a yard to meet her, when they shook hands, but with no great manifestation of pleasure on either side ; and then Clara, declining the chair offered her near the fire, by observing that it was not cold, retreated to the side of her aunt, who, after having assured Mr. Dalrymple, in an accent of graceful fervour, that she was enchanted to see him, had begun playing patience, from a sort of affectionate feeling towards the cards, which led her to think that they had been set aside rather rudely, and to wish that they should not be altogether forgotten and neglected.

“It is time for tea, is it not ?” said Clara, addressing her father ; “I expected to find the tea-urn waiting for me, or I should not have left my letter unfinished.”

Mr. Dalrymple heard this, and felt as he had often done before, that it was extremely lucky Miss Meddows had not inspired him with any feeling more tender than a mere just and reasonable admiration for her beauty ; as she obligingly made it so very evident that his presence and his absence were equally indifferent to her.

The tea-equipage arrived, and, as usual, Mr. Dalrymple was not far from Clara’s side, while she presided over it ; and, as usual, the conversation by degrees became animated. However little love there might be between the gentleman and lady, they certainly both felt that the other conversed agreeably, and it frequently occurred that within five minutes after a very stiff greeting on both sides, they were engaged in earnest and interesting discourse. Sir George, as usual also, fell back upon the card-table, when sipping his tea, and handling the cards, as if

by accident, he soon found himself once more in the act of dealing, without very well knowing how it came about. It was then that the younger pair held their discussions on painting, music, poetry, and what not. But never, on either side, had there been the slightest approach to flirtation, which word, however vulgar, unfortunately admits not of a substitute, as none other in the language expresses the same thing. The acute Mrs. Longuéville, indeed, was quite persuaded that neither in France nor England had her proud shy niece liked any one so well as Mr. Dalrymple, and greatly was she provoked that she could perceive nothing on the gentleman's side to justify any hope that this preference was returned. Frequent were the conversations which she held with her brother on the subject, and though he never could be brought to declare that he believed the gentleman to be quite indifferent, he agreed fully in thinking it expedient that matters should be suffered to take their course, without any interference whatever. In his secret soul, indeed, Sir George was fully determined upon having Mr. Dalrymple for a son-in-law, by hook or by crook, but of this determination he said not a word—no, not even to his sister.

With a good nature which made an essential part of his character, Dalrymple prepared to relinquish the sort of tea-table *tête-à-tête*, which, despite his indifference, he felt was often far from being disagreeable, and to receive the young stranger into the circle, as if his being there was not the least annoyance in the world. For this purpose, he again led the conversation to Chesterfield's literary pursuits, and asked Miss Meddows if she had yet sat in judgment on any of his productions.

"I have often heard his compositions spoken of with praise, by our good clergyman at Charlton," she replied; "but I have never seen them myself."

"Perhaps, Mr. Chesterfield, you have not yet unpacked your desk? otherwise, I should be tempted to ask for a specimen."

"All that I have are at my lodgings, sir," said Charles, his heart swelling with the hope that he might be sent for them.

This indeed did not happen, but Mr. Dalrymple said, "Have you not committed some of your verses to memory? Could you not recite some short thing to us by rote?"

"I will try, sir," replied Charles, rapidly running over in his head a dozen favourites, both long and short, every one of which he had repeated a hundred times to the echo of his native woods without missing a syllable. At length he decided upon giving a sonnet which he had laboured at, perhaps, more than any other composition.

"Deep, deep, I feel the potent spirit work!"

he began, in a trembling, husky, and almost sepulchral voice.

Then suddenly stopping, he raised his eyes to the ceiling, pressed his clasped hands upon his breast, and exclaimed,

“If my life depended upon it, I could not repeat another syllable!”

Charles Chesterfield was very handsome, and of that peculiar style of beauty which fanciful people call picturesque. Nothing could be more favourable to its display than the attitude into which he had thrown himself; yet his evident agitation, and even suffering, were so perfectly unaffected and genuine, that it was impossible not to feel both interest and admiration. Dalrymple turned his eyes from the young poet to his fair listener to see what effect he seemed to have produced—she appeared neither to see nor hear him!

It was probably pity at seeing him thus abominably neglected, which made Mr. Dalrymple at that moment conceive so strong a degree of interest for him, that he at once determined to use all his efforts to bring him forward. Not being himself a constant resident in London, it struck him that the most effectual manner in which he could do this, would be to present him to a certain Mr. Gibson, whose whole life, and those of his wife and daughters also, were passed in cultivating the friendship of people of talent, in devoting themselves to their service, and in being the means of bringing into the light of day the flowers which, from untoward accidents of birth, seem born to blush unseen, and, unless assisted by some generous hand, to waste their sweetness altogether upon the desert air.

This Mr. Gibson was a man of easy fortune, and as long as he continued to inhabit the country, might have been termed rich; but his family having for the last four or five years enjoyed what they were wont to call the exquisite luxury of literary life in London, could no longer find contentment in the “merely vegetable existence” to be found out of it.

Happily, with one exception only, the feelings of the whole family were in perfect unison. With *one* exception, they all equally disliked the country, and adored the town; father, mother, and daughters, all with one exception were ready to make any and every imaginable sacrifice, so that they might but continue to give literary parties, and have innumerable tables covered with albums, all filled with original compositions, of which, for the most part, they were themselves the subject.

The *one* exception to this family harmony was fortunately not a person of sufficient personal importance to produce any very perceptible discord.

Marianne Gibson, the third daughter out of five, was evidently intended as an insignificant person by Nature, being exceedingly

small in all her proportions; totally insensible, as it appeared, to all the glory of renown; passionately fond of the country; and hating London, and all that belonged to it, heartily. There was but one way of treating so perverse a spirit—namely, the taking no notice whatever of her before company, and paying as little attention to her in private, as the untoward accident of her having some independent thousands from an uncle would permit. This very rational mode of proceeding was adopted by every member of the family; and unquestionably a great deal of unprofitable discussion was spared thereby.

Most fortunately for the immediate prosecution of Mr. Dalrymple's friendly plans for Charles Chesterfield, Mr. Gibson was engaged to breakfast with him on the following morning at his chambers. The acquaintance between Mr. Gibson and Mr. Dalrymple was not merely that of London visiting; for the large estate of Mr. Dalrymple was divided from the small estate of Mr. Gibson only by a narrow lane, and though it was only during the last few years that they had become personally acquainted, it not unfrequently happened that county questions equally interesting to both arose, which caused something of more intimate relation between them than would have been likely to take place without. In the Gibson family, Mr. Dalrymple was naturally considered as a very great man, though not so devoted to literature as might have been desirable in a person of his ample fortune; but on the whole he was highly esteemed by them, and he was perhaps aware that no request of his was likely to be neglected.

After again turning his eyes for a moment to the animated yet embarrassed countenance of the young minstrel, he said,

“Never mind, Mr. Chesterfield! ‘All is not lost that is delayed!’ I shall hope to hear and see your verses too at some future opportunity; meanwhile, I think if you could come and breakfast with me to-morrow morning, I might introduce you to a gentleman who might make both a useful and agreeable acquaintance for you. Will you inquire at the Albany chambers for me to-morrow morning at ten?”

Here were the first-fruits of his journey to London, and that within five hours of his arrival! How should he ever be able to testify one thousandth part of the gratitude he owed to Sir George Meddows for the generous kindness that had brought him there?

The invitation was accepted with such evident delight, that Dalrymple congratulated himself sincerely upon having thought of it. But the heart of Charles was too full to permit of his remaining longer in company; so, whispering a petition into Sir

George's ear for permission to send for a cab, he took his leave, and was presently landed, with all his packages, at his little lodgings in South Molton-street, a great deal happier than any king on record, and more crammed full of hope than the lowest depths of Pandora's box.

Before he slept, he sat down in his own parlour, and having carefully unpacked his writing-desk, began the first page of his London journal.

Before Mr. Dalrymple left Bruton-street, he asked Sir George Meddows if it were an object with his young friend to turn his poetical talent to immediate profit, and also whether his circumstances were such as to render success really important to him.

Sir George drew his friend aside ere he answered him; and the ladies presumed that in his own diplomatic way he was communicating the history of the unexpected legacy. But they were mistaken. Sir George's reply to Dalrymple's question was this:

"His success, Arthur, is of the most vital importance both to himself and his aged parents. Money—money is the great object; the boy has decidedly great facility, and this must, if possible, be turned to account."

"I will do all I can to assist him," said the young man; and, making a farewell bow to the ladies, he departed.

CHAPTER VI.

Charles Chesterfield makes rapid Strides towards Renown—He is introduced to a pre-eminently literary Coterie, and presented to Mr. Marchmont, one of the greatest Men of the Age, and Editor of "The Regenerator"—Its effect upon him.

It will not be doubted that Charles arrived punctually at the breakfast-table of Mr. Dalrymple; so punctually, indeed, that it was nearly half an hour before Mr. Gibson arrived. But his host, who perhaps anticipated this ultra-exactness, was ready to receive him, and the half-hour was spent very advantageously for Charles in *tête-à-tête* conversation with a man, equally favoured by nature and fortune, and with a heart and head less corrupted by the world, and his own prosperous position in it, than it is by any means common to meet with, at the ripe age of twenty-five years and nine months.

With such a one it was impossible that Charles Chesterfield could fail to inspire a friendly degree of interest. The genuine enthusiasm, the youthful freshness of all his feelings, and of all his thoughts,—the glowing yet almost unspeakable gratitude with which Dalrymple's attention inspired him, and the tone of

old-fashioned quaintness, if not of originality, which he found in his various compositions and remarks (for Charles had brought a few verses), altogether produced a very strong impression in his favour.

This happy half-hour wore rapidly away, and Mr. Gibson made his appearance. No individual whom his distinguished young neighbour could have invited to breakfast would have appeared to this gentleman unworthy of the most marked politeness and attention; but when Mr. Dalrymple stated Charles Chesterfield to be a young author, whom he expected would speedily become a great favourite with the public, his advances towards forming an immediate friendship with him were very ardent indeed. Charles at this moment appeared to touch the very goal of all his fondest hopes. He was already spoken of, and spoken to, as an author, a poet, a London author, and a London poet; and had he been offered five hundred pounds in exchange for the honours of that morning he would have rejected them with indignation.

"I trust you are not as yet so buried up and overwhelmed with invitations, my dear sir, as to prevent my introducing you to my family immediately?" said Mr. Gibson.

"I have no acquaintance in London as yet, sir, and shall be most happy to have the honour of waiting upon you," replied Charles ingenuously.

"Is it possible? I will confess to you, my dear young gentleman, that I hear this with great pleasure, and I feel extremely grateful to my friend, Mr. Dalrymple, for having given me this opportunity of making your acquaintance before the innumerable claims which are sure to beset a man of genius have so entangled you in their chains, as to render it difficult, not to say impossible, to lay the foundation of that sort of particular intimacy which thoroughly literary people are so desirous of cultivating with the favourite authors of the day. We now start fair, Mr. Chesterfield, nay, I am willing to hope with some little advantage; and I think I may venture to promise you many thoroughly intellectual hours at my house. Mrs. Gibson, though I say it that should not, is certainly rather a remarkable person—is she not, Dalrymple? I don't mean at all, however, to speak of her as an authoress—nothing like it. In fact, she has never done any thing herself, beyond the illustrating the great work of the immortal Milton, and there, indeed, she has shown what the tone of her mind really is, without exaggeration: I may avow to you, sir, that it is extraordinary. I have been told by one or two of our leading print-shops, that if she perseveres—and upon my word I think she is capable of any thing on such a subject—

if she perseveres, they assure me that the copy may become worth a thousand pounds. It is a singular undertaking, a very singular undertaking for a lady. But you will judge of this better for yourself, Mr. Chesterfield, when you become an *habitué* in the *boudoir*, as I trust you soon will do, than I can enable you to do by any description."

Notwithstanding the flattering conclusion of this speech, poor Charles at that moment felt a pang most completely new to him. He shuddered, literally shuddered, at his own ignorance! Of the "Paradise Lost" he knew more perhaps than most lads of his age, but as to what could be meant by a lady's illustrating the work, till it became worth a thousand pounds, he knew no more than his mother's cow, Brindle. Mr. Dalrymple saw all this in his heightened colour and troubled aspect. His very eyes seemed to blush as he turned them from the face of Mr. Gibson to his own coffee-cup, and from his coffee-cup again to Mr. Gibson's face. But in this Arthur saw no very important drawback to the young man's success. "His learning is of another kind," thought he. "He would have better understood a gloss upon Appian, or Opius, than a fair lady's illustration of any work under the sun;" and coming across the stream of Mr. Gibson's eloquence, by calling his attention to a broiled chicken, he said, "I am quite pleased, Gibson, that I have contrived to get you and Mr. Chesterfield here together, as I feel certain that the acquaintance will be mutually gratifying. You will find in him the sort of talent so well appreciated by yourself, and all your family, and by your means I am in hopes he will soon overcome all the difficulties which of necessity surround a young author, when first entering upon his career. You are well acquainted, I believe, with the editors of several popular periodical works, and it may be desirable, perhaps, that Mr. Chesterfield's first efforts should appear in one of these. Will you have the kindness to introduce him wherever you think there would be the best chance of his finding encouragement?"

"Let him come to us to-night," replied Mr. Gibson eagerly. "Mrs. Gibson will have a small, quite a small, committee this evening, of some of the cleverest men of the day. Our system is to take no colour, Mr. Dalrymple, absolutely no colour whatever, and this enables us to seize upon talent wherever we find it, and our little party to-night will be perfectly antithetic. This, as I take it, is the real secret of a perfectly well-organized literary society. In my own family I encourage the greatest freedom of opinion on all subjects. No two of us, I believe, think exactly the same on any subject of importance; the consequence of which is, that our *salon* is equally agreeable to all parties. I

mention this, Mr. Chesterfield, to set you at your ease among us. Let your colour be what it may, you may venture to pronounce yourself."

Poor Charles again felt terribly in the dark; nevertheless he had understood enough to make him superlatively happy. He was invited to make one in a party of London *literati*, and the wide earth had no pleasure to offer which he would have accepted in exchange for it.

Mr. Dalrymple perceived that he had achieved exactly what he wished as an opening, and trusted to his *protégé's* good gifts for the rest; while Mr. Gibson knew that he was about to convey to his lady and daughters the most agreeable news he could possibly bring them.

Thus all, equally pleased by the result of the meeting, were equally willing to bring it to a close, and they soon separated, with a most satisfactory increase of contentment on all sides.

It was with great modesty, though with undisguised delight, that Charles announced at the dinner-table the invitation he had received. Sir George expressed himself well pleased. "I knew Dalrymple could be useful," he said. "He could not have done any thing better for you. Every body knows Gibson; and, better still, Gibson knows every body. But, look ye, Charles, if you begin to get invitations in this way, I must positively send my tailor to you. That broad-cloth suit your good father boasted of may be kept as good as new till you get back to Maplebury. I'll send to Willis and order him to dispatch a fellow here to-morrow to take your measure."

Clara Meddows heard all this, and knit her brows. Mrs. Longuéville did not hear it at all, and as neither of them spoke, and Sir George drew forth two or three letters from his pocket, Charles ventured to make a circular bow and steal away, thinking it might be advantageous to spend a solitary hour or two at his lodgings, preparing himself for any questions which might be asked him, concerning what he had already done, or what it was his intention to do; and also by selecting such of his more important compositions as he should best like to show, in case he should be asked to exhibit a specimen. Slowly and carefully he dressed himself, though more than half-ashamed of deeming his external appearance of any consequence on an occasion so purely intellectual; and then, for a long hour of trembling but delicious agitation, he sat before his large country-made desk, surrounded by folio pages, on which were written in a fair round-hand, odes, sonnets, and songs, while the more massive labour of a recently-finished volume of tales lay neatly packed in quarto sheets beside him. Often did he make a selection for the possible

wants of the evening, and as often change it, till at length the dreaded yet longed-for moment arrived, and the girl of the house entered to announce that the cab he had ordered to convey him to Baker-street was at the door. In all haste he now seized upon the three compositions which little Bessy had praised the most, and, hastily locking up the rest, hurried into his cab and drove off. The drive is rather a long one, but to him it seemed hardly to occupy three minutes, so insufficient did the interval appear for his last meditations as to the manner in which he ought to present himself. Shyness, as naturally the result of the manner in which he had passed his life as was the bloom on his cheek, and the unquenched brightness of his eye, struggled hard within him against his immense disdain of every species of distinction not arising from literary renown.

“If there be any authors there,” thought he, “authors who have already published, and are received into the republic of letters, to these I will bow low, as an eastern slave before the throned master of his existence; but I will not, for I ought not, to tremble, or suffer my spirit to quail, before any other distinction whatever. It is this which I must ever keep in mind; it is this which must teach me to raise my eye undaunted, forgetful that my home has been a farm-house, and my kindred the tillers of the soil.”

At this moment the cab drew up suddenly, very suddenly, and Charles was thrown forward with a jerk, which very nearly brought him, nose foremost, on the pavement. Being active and alert, however, he saved himself by seizing upon some portion of the harness, and swung himself safely to the ground. But this *tour de force* was much less difficult than that by which, after paying his cabman with a hand which shook from nervous agitation, and stammering his own name, first to one puzzled servant and then to another, he at last mounted the stairs to make his first appearance in the arena where alone he wished to combat and to conquer. The sound of rushing waters seemed to gurgle in his ears, as the drawing-room door was thrown open. In the midst of this he distinguished the words “Mr. Charles Chesterfield!” and in the next moment he found himself, without knowing very well how he got there, standing precisely in the middle of the room, one hand in that of the gentleman whom he had met at breakfast in the morning, and the other clasped by a lady, who evidently deemed herself privileged to take it, held it firmly, and long enough to make the following speech before she resigned it:

“Welcome, Mr. Charles Chesterfield! a thousand times welcome! We literary people have a sort of freemasonry amongst us, which outvalues a thousand introductions! I feel at once

that you are *of us*! May I not flatter myself that you, too, feel that you have got among kindred souls?"

The features of the tall lady who thus addressed him were large and strongly marked, and might, perhaps in early youth, have been accounted handsome by the class of persons who admire a countenance of almost masculine firmness and decision. Whether Mr. Gibson, who was of a slight and rather delicate fabric, might have ventured upon so disproportioned an alliance, if not encouraged and stimulated by the lady's being in possession of ten thousand pounds, may be doubtful; but be this as it may, the marriage was accomplished, and proved one of singular felicity. Nothing, indeed, could exceed Mr. Gibson's admiration of his lady's intellectual powers, which she confessed herself were something of a masculine order, and which he delighted to proclaim aloud to be "first of the first." Of the five daughters who crowned this happy union no detailed description can be necessary, as any curiosity which the kind reader may feel concerning them, will probably be sufficiently gratified in the course of the following pages.

There are few novices whom Mrs. Gibson could have addressed in the words above quoted who would have listened to them with so satisfactory a degree of self-assured intelligence as himself. Charles Chesterfield understood her perfectly. "Yes! there is such freemasonry!" was the response instantly and distinctly made by his kindling eye and delightful smile; and, had he spoken volumes, the lady could not have comprehended better the gratitude and the happiness that were swelling at his heart. She pressed the hand she held with an energy and freedom which ladies of fifty (if they like it) may bestow unchallenged upon any hand, and, nodding her head with very significant approbation, added, "Enough! I know you, Charles Chesterfield, as well as if I had myself assisted in the development of the mind so delightfully legible at this moment in your features!"

"I knew it! I was perfectly sure of it!" exclaimed Mr. Gibson, in the glad voice of one to whom disappointment in the hope just realized would have brought terror, as well as grief. "I was quite sure, my dear darling love, that, with your astonishing and unerring tact, you would immediately appreciate the talent of this young man. I was perfectly sure of it. Upon my honour I was. Dalrymple will be delighted, perfectly delighted, when he hears you have taken him by the hand. You are launched, young gentleman, I can tell you that, and I heartily wish you joy of it. I shall leave you in her hands; altogether and entirely in her hands. She will tell you, better than I can, in whose presence you are, which, if I mistake not, you will count among the things worth

knowing." And Mr. Gibson turned his thumb, which had probably become flexible by the habit of indicating the distinguished persons in his circle, to the uninitiated, over his shoulder, towards a personage who stood leaning against the chimney-piece, silently reconnoitring the company by a pair of glasses which were suspended round his neck, though looking the while as if he scarcely thought it worth his trouble to do so.

Having performed this expressive manœuvre, accompanied by a significant yet mysterious nod, Mr. Gibson walked off, leaving Charles in a state of perfect felicity, all timidity having for the moment completely left him, while his secret but long-cherished belief in his own powers returned upon him, freed from all the paralyzing effects of shyness. It was, in truth, a moment of ecstasy. As Mr. Gibson walked off, he caught the arm of his youngest daughter, who was the one of all his four intellectual children to whom he was the most inclined to venture upon a little display of individual consequence, and said, "Theodosia, my dear, I wish you to be very civil to that young man. I decidedly mean to patronize him. It is a marked thing, Theodosia, a very marked thing, to be the first to bring a *débutant* into notice. I own I like it."

"Is this the first literary *soirée* at which he ever assisted?" demanded the young lady, passing her fingers through the knot of papa's black stock, in order to improve the set of it; a species of personal attention, indeed, which she often bestowed upon him; for, inheriting in a strong degree his own propensity to patronize, she was wont to exercise it in a very flattering manner upon himself, never failing to set him to rights in all ways when she thought him wrong, which, as it happened frequently, occasioned his receiving a degree of notice from her which made her decidedly his favourite. Not that he in the least degree wondered at or resented the inattention of his other daughters. Mr. Gibson was much too sensible a man not to be aware of the effect of great intellectual powers upon the manners and tempers of young ladies so distinguished by Providence, and he felt too proud of being the husband of Mrs. Gibson, and the father of those four very superior young women, the Miss Gibsons (not to mention the one called Marianne, who did not indeed count for much), to complain of what he considered as the inevitable consequence of their early and devoted attention to literature. Yet, notwithstanding the philosophical love of mind to which he had thus brought himself, he certainly did like Theodosia's praising and patronizing, and they were considered by every body as being most wonderfully attached to each other, and as offering a perfect pattern of fatherly and daughterly love.

"Is this the first literary *soirée* at which he ever assisted?" said the young lady a second time, giving her papa a little pat upon his cheek as she completed the arrangement of his cravat.

"Certainly the first in London, my dear," replied the stock-still father, "for he arrived only yesterday. Thank you, Dosy, darling, that will do, won't it? There, I can see it in the glass, my love, and you have made it look quite stylish. Go to your mamma now, and I dare say she will present him."

Theodosia took the hint, and repaired to the side of her mother, but the animated lady was not at that moment at leisure to attend to her. In explanation of her husband's parting words she had said, "Yes, Chesterfield! I will do you this service without delay. That gentleman with the long hair and uncovered throat is Marchmont! That I can reckon him as my dearest friend, and most constant guest, is the great glory of my life! When I tell you that there is nothing which the world could offer which I could not sacrifice rather than lose this distinction, you may judge in some degree what he must be. Noble creature! Does he not seem, as he stands there, *lorgnette* in hand, looking out upon the world, does he not look like a being of a superior order reading the very souls of all around him?"

The voice of Mrs. Gibson was rather remarkable for being loud and clear, and as she did not lower it while she uttered these words, it was difficult to believe that Mr. Marchmont did not hear them, but no trace of his doing so was perceptible on his countenance; nay, when she had approached close to him, with her arm passed through that of Charles, and pronounced aloud, "Marchmont" within a foot of his ear, he still appeared unconscious that she spoke.

"Gracious Heaven! what abstraction!" said Mrs. Gibson, turning to Charles. "Does it not remind you of the stories we have heard of Sir Isaac Newton? Beyond all question his power of withdrawing the soul from outward objects is one of the most precious privileges which nature accords to genius."

Charles looked in her face, not very well comprehending the nature of the privilege of which she spoke, but, fortunately, the look was more that of a person hanging entranced upon every syllable she uttered, than of one merely puzzled, and she therefore almost affectionately pressed his arm, as she replied, "A moment's thought, dear Mr. Chesterfield, will show you what I mean. Look at that striking countenance. Observe its calm—its utter ignorance of all around. Surely that power of withdrawing, as it were, the heavenward spirit from all that besets it here, and permitting it to soar on the wings of thought far above us all, has something godlike in it! But I must not leave him thus. My

voice must penetrate e'en to the depth of his shrine—for do I not bring him a new worshipper? Marchmont! dear Marchmont!" she continued, speaking ever clear and loud, so that all present might have heard her, "descend! come down! 't is time.' I must and will have you on earth, while I present to you Mr. Charles Chesterfield, a young votary of the nine, whom I have every reason to believe deserving that you should look upon him."

As Mrs. Gibson, notwithstanding the natural powers of her voice, did not wholly trust to it, but laid her hand on Mr. Marchmont's arm as she spoke, she at length succeeded in arousing his attention.

"What would you, my dear friend?" said he, in a whisper, soft as a western breeze.

"What would I, Marchmont?" she replied, joining her hands as if in the act of praying. "This, would I. That you should leave the region of pure and serene air, and inhabit our nether world for some short space, that I may present to you this young man, Mr. Charles Chesterfield, the chosen friend of Mr. Dalrymple, of Ripley-park, whose name you well know, and the *protégé*, or rather the adopted son, of Sir George Meddows, who has just brought him to town as his guest."

Mr. Marchmont, who now evidently heard every word she said, set his heels together, turned out his toes, and holding his eye-glasses in one hand, while he occupied the other in twiddling the chair, he made the nearest approach to a bow permissible to men of his class, that is to say, he bent his head till his chin touched his breast-pin.

Charles bowed too, in an old-fashioned way, and his handsome face spoke an animated wish to cultivate the acquaintance.

Mr. Marchmont laid his glasses with emphasis on Mrs. Gibson's shoulder, and accompanying the action by an expressive glance, the lady comprehended that a *tête-à-tête* was demanded, and accordingly led the way to an isolated sofa at the furthest extremity of the back drawing-room, a locality which seemed admirably suited for the purpose.

"You know I am your slave," he began, "and that my refusing to make the acquaintance of any one forced upon me by you is something quite beyond the reach of any conceivable probability. But will you have the excessive kindness to throw some light upon this matter? Why, my beloved Mrs. Gibson, *why* should I receive to my heart this pink and white young gentleman? This rosebud of a youth, with his magnificent grey eyes, and curly hair? Why must I cherish all this? Is it in my way, my dearest Mrs. Gibson?"

"A great deal more in your way than you have any idea of,

amico mio," replied the lady, speaking as nearly in a whisper as it was in her nature to do. "This young man is, I will venture to declare, very completely in your way. Of course I don't mean," she continued, suddenly checking herself, "of course I don't mean that he is one of the finest poets and prose writers in Europe—neither do I mean that he is the most influential literary patron in London. You raise those wicked eyebrows of yours, Marchmont, just as if you fancied I was saying so. But you don't really think any such thing, and, therefore, you may listen to me gravely, and believe what I state. This youth, this Charles Chesterfield, has received a particularly learned education. Such, at least, is the statement of Dalrymple to Mr. Gibson, and certainly he is a man to be trusted. But his passion for composition is so strong that he will adopt no profession, and has been brought to London by Sir George Meddows, solely for the purpose of being put forward as an author. It was but last week, you know, that you were telling me I must beat about for contributors, for that your editorial box was not so rich as usual. Did you not, Marchmont? And can any thing appear upon the scene more perfectly *à propos* than this incipient Apollo?"

"You are ever the same!" exclaimed Mr. Marchmont, snatching her hand, and pressing it with much energy; "forgive my petulance, my dearest friend! How perpetually it happens to me, when I am least thinking of it, that I find you

' Still the unseen light,
Guiding my way!'

Yes! I *do* want contributors. Alas! I want many things, dearest friend!—many things absolutely essential. But this is no moment for the unrestrained confidence which I like to bestow upon you—I must ask for another moment—to-morrow morning, perhaps? or the next day? Now we will think only of the young man you wish me to patronize. To say the truth, his learned education is, of itself, no great recommendation to me. My grammar is mankind, my friend; my dictionary is in the clouds. The winds are my syntax, and rushing cataracts my prosody! But the objection is not fatal. More than one of the most chosen spirits of young England—thanked be the gods! we now can talk of our *young England*, as our bright-soiled neighbours do of their *jeune France*. More than one of these, I have the happiness of knowing, have, at my bidding, thrown aside the worm-eaten toga in which for ages the intellectual strength of the country has been entangled. Depend upon it, my charming friend, learning is to genius what long and heavy drapery would be to Taglioni. To such a mind as yours the illustration requires no commentary. But to return to this young Chesterfield. I am quite ready to take him by the

hand, and will give him an audience either to-morrow morning or as soon afterwards as I can manage to find leisure."

"Would you like to see him here, dear Marchmont? I know that sometimes your room—You men of genius, you know, do sometimes indulge in a little eccentric confusion," said Mrs. Gibson affectionately.

"Ever thoughtful, ever kind!" replied Marchmont. "But no. If this youth is to work for me and with me, I must stand on no ceremony with him. He must see me as I am—and no matter." These last words were uttered in a tone of bitterness which drew a sigh from the lady. "Forgive me! dear and excellent Mrs. Gibson, forgive me! Well I know that did you possess a fairy wand, or any other power by which my poverty could be converted into wealth, the abode of your poor friend would not long be such as to call a blush upon that dear friendly cheek, at the idea of its being seen by a poor country lad, who seems himself but an object of splendid benevolence. But no more of this—

‘I know that heaven ordains me here
To run this mortal life’s career!’"

And, having uttered these words very plaintively, he offered his arm to the lady of the house, and they returned together to the outer drawing-room. Many persons had arrived since they left it, on several of whom Mrs. Gibson bestowed the greatly-prized honour of an introduction to Mr. Marchmont, as soon as the gentleman had reinstated himself in his favourite position, with his elbow on the chimney-piece, and his glasses at his eye. To this honoured spot a succession of persons were led by different members of the family, much in the same manner as they might have been marshalled to the feet of a sovereign; for in most cases no conversation followed, and, having made their bows and courtesies, they passed on, to make room for more.

But at length, no further presentations being anticipated, this first-magnitude star of the Gibson galaxy retired to the same isolated sofa in the back drawing-room which had been the scene of his *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Gibson; when, throwing himself upon it in an attitude of elegant ease, he began talking very decidedly aloud with a fashionable actor, who was almost as great a man as himself. This was a signal to all men, and, better still, to all women, too, that they intended to permit themselves to be made the centre of a circle. Nevertheless, it was of course understood also, that however like a sun, or two suns, they might be in brilliance, it was not intended that they should be the centre of the whole system, which would have been by far too great a tax upon their condescension. On the contrary, it was a part of the family tactics that whenever this species of literary centralization took

place in the small drawing-room, a musical centralization was simultaneously to be organized in the large one. Of this the fair Theodosia was the presiding genius. Not but that Theodosia was literary too; but, being excessively musical into the bargain, she divided her time between learning as much of Italian as was necessary to her songs, and practising them and their accompaniments on the pianoforte.

This gave her the right to consider herself as *prima donna* in the musical part of the establishment, and also as the Italian scholar *par excellence*, a double pre-eminence, which rendered her of great importance in her own family, as well as throughout the whole extended circle of their acquaintance.

When the accomplished young lady perceived that Mr. Marchmont had forsaken his favourite standing position in the larger room for his favourite lying position in the smaller one, she immediately uttered the usual note of preparation for a review of her musical forces; and no sooner did she run her fingers over the instrument, than all the young ladies who had, or fancied they had, a taste for music, fluttered up to the pianoforte; while all the young gentlemen who could sing a little, or flute a little, or fiddle a little, or turn over a page of music in the right place, all fluttered after them. And then began a critical survey, for the hundredth time, perhaps, in some instances, of Miss Theodosia's musical library; and there might be heard little indistinct warblings of favourite airs in one place; and there might be seen little graceful white-gloved runnings over of difficult passages—not on the keys, but on the leaves, in another. And if young gentlemen wished to flirt, they flirted; and if young ladies wished to whisper, they whispered, unheard by chaperons, and perfectly justified by custom.

While all this was going on, entirely according to rule, in one place, display of a higher order was preparing in another. By degrees the startling stare-traps uttered by Mr. Marchmont, and the lively or sentimental rejoinders of his dramatic friend, Mr. Marvel, drew round them all the highest intellect in the company; and then, to biting jest and high-toned moral satire, were joined philosophical discussion, and some of those noble flights of unrestrained thought for which Mr. Marchmont was so deservedly celebrated.

On the other corner of the sofa, selected by this gentleman as his cathedra for the hour, sat Mrs. Gibson, her long back supported by sundry cushions piled against its elbow, and her admiring eyes turned full upon the singular and very animated countenance of her eloquent friend. Several ladies had drawn chairs forward, so as to form a semi-circle round him, while

many others, among whom were the three most pre-eminently intellectual daughters of the house, stood near. Almeria, indeed, the youngest, and, next to her mother, the most enthusiastic of the family, continued to balance her slender person sideways on the back of the sofa, and thereby secured to herself the same advantage of gazing in the speaker's face, as her mamma herself enjoyed. Mr. Marvel, who continued to sustain that distinguished part in the conversation which consists in exciting by seeming opposition the most daring propositions and most startling theories, was stationed exactly behind Mrs. Gibson, amusing himself very gracefully with the tall pole of a screen, which he sometimes seemed to sustain, and sometimes seemed to sustain him, with an easy elegance that produced an excellent effect. Near to this gentlemen, and modestly hid behind him, stood Charles Chesterfield, his whole soul abiding in his eyes and ears, and feeling as if the moments then passing over him were of more value than all the years he had ever lived before. The rest of the listeners sat or stood as accident or convenience dictated; but as it was an understood thing in the family that Mr. Gibson did not quite belong to the very particularly select committee whose proudest privilege was thus permitted to hang upon the inspired rhapsodies of Mr. Marchmont, he divided himself in about equal portions between the two rooms, and might be seen alternately indicating with his inverted thumb the wonders of both, to such of the company as especially belonged to neither.

"That you, Marvel, of all men in the world, should doubt the steady undeviating progression of man towards the perfection which some dream of in a divinity, is astonishing!" said Mr. Marchmont, so placing himself as very nearly to deposit one foot on the sofa, and shading his eyes with his hand as if more steadily to peruse the countenance of the friend he addressed.

"Nay, my friend, you go too fast for me;" replied Mr. Marvel, holding up both hands as if to deprecate the fiery advance of the orator. "I know by experience that it is pretty nearly impossible to listen to you on any theme, without becoming in the end convinced that you are right. But you should have some mercy on those who are too earthly dull to scale the heavens at a leap, like yourself!"

"Gracious Heaven, Marvel! Do you want a logical induction to prove to you that man has within himself the elements of all that constitutes what religionists have erected into a divinity?"

"That might prove a troublesome want, good folks; so you had better take the philosopher's advice, and do without it if you can," said a young woman dressed almost like a quaker, who, seated on a very low ottoman on the other side of the chimney-

piece, appeared busily engaged in cutting out horses and dogs in paper, by the aid of a pair of waxlights, with a green shade over them.

This interruption caused the conversation to pause for a moment, which might not however have been the case, had not Charles, startled by its unexpected tone, thrust forward his head to look across the chimney-piece, and reconnoitre the speaker.

"Oh! for Heaven's sake, don't stop!" exclaimed Almeria; "it is only Marianne's fun."

Mr. Marchmont, indeed, appeared too much at home to take any great notice of so idle an observation, and proceeded.

"To convince the idea of an intelligence superior to one's own is impossible; and those who affect to do so are false to nature and to truth. Did I believe in such a doctrine, I would cease to exist within four-and-twenty hours. But I have no faculty within me to lead to such a belief."

"Then what a much cleverer fellow the frog was when he looked at the ox," said Marianne. "However, if it saves you from bursting, it is a great blessing."

"Magnificent idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, with a sigh that seemed to relieve the fulness of a heart bursting with admiration, and with her eyes so steadily fixed on the face of the philosopher, as to make it evident that she could not have heard the remark of her malapert daughter. "How little, how pitiful," she continued, with emotion, "do the ordinary feelings and opinions of common men appear after words like these! And to what elevation may not the incommunicable mind hope to attain, when it has power to generate and bring forth thoughts thus challenging divinity?"

Charles Chesterfield would have given the world to have asked the philosopher for an explanation; for, perfectly certain that he could not really mean what his words seemed to imply, he felt a burning anxiety to discover the hidden sense which the more finished education of the rest of the company evidently revealed to them. But it would have been vastly easier for him to have construed off-hand the most difficult passage in Pindar, than to have shown forth his doubts and his ignorance in such a presence. He therefore continued to stand, silently gazing on the group before him, and carefully treasuring every word that met his ear, determined, should what followed fail to elucidate what had gone before, to transmit the whole to Mr. Westbrook, nothing doubting that the deep learning of that excellent divine would throw light upon what seemed now to be hid in perfect darkness. In his own heart he believed that Mr. Marchmont was bringing forward some forgotten doctrine of the pro-Platonic school, with

which Mr. Westbrook had not thought it necessary to make him acquainted; and though he scrupled not to confess to himself that such notions were idle enough to justify eternal oblivion, he could not help feeling a little vexed, nevertheless, at finding the learning on which he had so prided himself insufficient to help him through the first conversation he had listened to in London, though so many of the weaker sex appeared capable of comprehending all its abstruse allusions perfectly.

“Marchmont!” cried Mrs. Gibson, suddenly changing the theme, either from the urgent necessity of hearing her own voice, or from the wish to exhibit the versatile powers of her friend, in whose hands, as she well knew, every subject was sure to

“suffer a *sea* change
Into something rich and strange.”

“My dear Marchmont! tell me something more, I entreat you, about that delightful Pendergrass, whose divine poems you reviewed so admirably last week. Conceive! that an American should come and flash upon us in this way like a thunderbolt from heaven! Is it not marvellous?”

“I think not,” replied Mr. Marchmont; “neither will you think so, either, my dear Mrs. Gibson, profoundly enlightened as you are, if you will give the subject a little fair consideration. Is not the fact perfectly analogous to the universal order of nature? whose operations, thank Heaven, we are beginning to understand, without being obliged to have recourse to persons having their heads thatched with horsehair. *O qual piacer!* as your lovely Theodosia would say, to remember that we have, at last, thrown aside our blinkers, and dare to look around us, without fear of starting!”

“Oh, you erratic comet!” exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, while all the little circle welcomed the charming phrase with an approving smile. “Where have you got to now? and what have heads, thatched with horsehair, as you deliciously describe our bygone pedants, to do with the question of American poetry?”

“An immense deal, charming lady! an enormous deal!” replied Mr. Marchmont, suddenly sitting upright, and placing the forefinger of his right hand on the thumb of his left, as if about to enumerate a succession of proofs.

“An unknown quantity,” said a clear but very quiet voice from the other side of the fireplace.

Mr. Marchmont fell back into his reclining position.

Mrs. Gibson looked grievously annoyed, and exchanged a glance with Almeria, who, bending forward till her lips were almost close to the critic’s ear, said in a whisper heard by very few beside himself,

“Don't vex mamma by minding her! Go on.”

Remaining still for a moment, not as if silenced, but with an aspect of profound meditation, Mr. Marchmont looked up into the face of the young lady who had spoken to him as if he did not see her, but was looking through the space she occupied to some object far beyond her, and at length said, addressing Mrs. Gibson,

“Did you ever watch the action of a spring, when a weight which is heavily pressed upon it is withdrawn?”

“Oh, yes!” replied the lady, with a sort of volant admiration, that seemed ready to take wing, and fly off in whatever direction he might please to indicate.

“Well, then, you have seen it start up, as if by instinct, with new life and power. Such is the action of long-crushed genius on the other side of the Atlantic at present. Learning, such as pedants teach and schoolmen value, has found no genial soil in the free unshackled region of the brave new world. They scorn the long and tedious process by which, till a new light broke in upon us, we sought to distil upon the intellects of each successive race the hoarded thoughts and old-world speculations of those who went before. Absurd! as if the youthful vigour of each new-born age did not out-value, a hundred and a hundred fold, the musty lucubrations embalmed by superstition, and enshrined in dust, of those who were dead and rotten two thousand years ago? This pitiable reverence for antiquity is now, happily, passing from the earth for ever; but as long as it held unbroken sway in Europe, it weighed upon the bright young spirits of America with a sort of intellectual tyranny, in very close analogy to the political chains from which, long ago, praised be the gods! they so nobly emancipated themselves. It has taken them another half-century to render their literature as free as their citizens.”

“And their negroes,” said the tiresome paper-cutter.

“Another half-century,” resumed Mr. Marchmont, not appearing to hear her. “But at length the conquest is complete, and the poets of the United States now pour forth their inspired strains, unshackled by any laws, save what themselves have made.”

“Admirable!” Is he not rich to-night?” said Mrs. Gibson, aside, to Almeria; but happily in a whisper so distinct, as to be heard by all: and thus encouraged, not a voice failed to murmur, like the timid echoes of softly undulating hills in the distance, “admirable!”

While Mr. Gibson made his way up to the pianoforte, his thumb pointing backwards the whole time, and his head rising and falling in what seemed a very mysterious manner to the uninitiated, but which to the better informed said quite as plainly as any.

words could have done, "There never was any thing equal to him! no, never in the world;" had not Miss Theodosia herself been in the very act of singing one of Grisi's most difficult songs, it is probable that at least some of the musical circle might have been seduced by these eloquent gesticulations to join themselves to the literary one; but this particular song was of course a treat that could not be given up, and only three young ladies, and one young gentleman, who had neither been asked to play or to sing, migrated.

"And you think Mr. Pendergrass the first among this emancipated phalanx?" said Mr. Marvel.

"Decidedly," replied Marchmont.

"Oh! Mr. Marchmont—could you not recite a few stanzas to us?" said Almeria, beseechingly.

"Assuredly, if you wish it, fair girl!" replied the critic, turning his eye, however, upon her more important mamma, to ascertain whether his doing so would accord with her wishes.

"Do you look doubtingly at me, Marchmont?" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson. "Is it indeed possible that you should not know the delight it would give me? My little Almeria and I are generally of one mind in these matters."

"Be it so, then," he replied. "I will give you some lines, as yet unpublished, which he sent to me last week, to know if I advised their being added to the new edition. I know not how it happens, but I never read any very beautiful poetry without its adhering to me, like a part of myself as it were."

"A sort of chemical affinity," said Marianne, looking up from her work, and fixing her eyes for a moment on the face of Mr. Marchmont.

He bowed to her as if greatly flattered, and went on. "I can always repeat what I greatly admire, without making any effort whatever to commit it to memory. The lines I am now going to recite are on a Star, and, in my opinion, show an originality of thought which leads instantly to the conclusion that they are the genuine unsophisticated product of a new world. They are entitled,

'LINES ON A STAR SEEN AT MIDNIGHT, AFTER DRINKING TEA WITH A
VERY BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADY.'

'Bright candle in an everlasting stick!

How soothingly thy trembling rays descend

Upon a heart from o'erwrought feeling sick,

Whose leaping pulses towards madness tend!

'Ah! I have touch'd her!—As the temperate bowl,

Innoxious, fill'd wholly with total tea,

From her hand pass'd to mine, my phrensied soul

Caught from that touch celestial ecstasy.

‘Yes! I have touch’d her! Let the golden strings
From whence thy native harp, O glancing star!
Its soft accords to lessen startless flings,
Sending their music on the winds afar.

‘Let its sweet notes the blissful truth convey,
In sounds eternal as the theme I sing,
That tea thus handed, with dear coy delay,
Can rapture, such as gods might envy, bring.

‘And tears shall fall the while; and innocent sighs,
Such as babes breathe upon a mother’s breast,
Shall fan the air till the wild fever flies,
Leaving the storm-swept heart once more at rest.’”

As he repeated the last plaintive stanza, the voice of Mr. Marchmont sunk into a still, small, whisper, which seemed an echo to the delicate thought it expressed; one moment of impressive universal silence followed, broken at length by a soft chorus of female sighs, and in one or two instances by that sort of blowing by the nose which accompanies weeping.

“I ask no stronger proof of the power of this transatlantic genius,” said the critic, throwing up his arms as in triumph, “than its effect on such an audience as this. I would reject the judgment of the merely learned, I would reject too the judgment of mere natural feeling, unrefined by an acquaintance with the thrilling literature of the day. But here we have hearts and minds precisely in the state best qualified to pass sentence on the productions of intellect. In truth, I mark it as one of the most promising features in the intellectual aspect of the eventful epoch in which we live, that its literature, however soaring or however profound, is not of the dry hard nature that tends to indurate our hearts against the passions which constitute the life-blood of existence. Out on the doctrines of the heavy icebergs, who would make us believe that passion leads to sin! Rather would I that the green sod should instantly be heaped upon this heaving breast, and crush it at once into eternal sleep, than live with the sparkling current of my blood restrained by precept!—Women!—waxlights!—wine!” he continued, as his widely-opened roving eye fixed itself on a tray containing sundry decanters, sandwiches, and tartlets, which, if a literary dinner had not preceded the evening coterie, always appeared at rather an early hour—“these form the atmosphere in which man loves to live!”

“You shall not move, Marchmont!” exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, starting from her reclining posture, and laying her hand upon the great man’s arms; “I never like you so well as when you are lounging upon this dear sofa. Why have tables castors but to run? Push that table over, some of you. There’s dear

creatures! Almeria! step after William, and tell him to bring the liqueur-chest and hot water. Do I not know your wants and wishes, Marchmont?"

"And do you not know how to spoil me, Mrs. Gibson?"

"How is it possible to pet you beyond your deserts, while you minister to our enjoyments as you have done this evening? But tell me, dear friend, is it beyond reach of hope that we should see this gifted Pendergrass here? I have no words to tell how I should feel at beholding the author of those heart-searching words,

‘and innocent sighs,

Such as babes breathe upon a mother’s breast.’

The purity—the elevation of thought—the sweet simplicity—the ineffable tenderness, all combine to lap the spirits in elysium."

"And is not that about '*celestial ecstasy*' very fine mamma?" said Almeria, in a soft murmur, seemingly intended only for her mother's ear.

"Admirable, my love. Sit down, Miss Fortingale. Mr. Embsby, you can find a corner there by Almeria. The Marvel must not be separated from the Marchmont. They are flint and steel to each other. Oh! there is more room yet at this dear little table! It is positively elastic, and has an especial propensity to stretch itself at the approach of talent."

"Does it shrink, mamma, before the want of it?" said Marianne, rising. "At any rate, there is no room for me;" and so saying, she took up the shaded stand which held her two waxlights, and walked off.

Meanwhile such of the party as modestly deemed themselves not sufficiently gifted to produce a favourable effect upon the elastic table silently withdrew themselves to the other room; and some others edged in the corner of a chair, and one leg, in order to show that they were of those for whom the little sentient table was sure to be large enough. Poor Charles alone seemed at a loss to know where to go, or what he ought to do. The effort of walking from the corner wherein he had hitherto stood ensconced, and passing conspicuously round the bright constellation which surrounded the magic table, was greatly too much for his courage; yet to stay and listen, unlicensed, to all the wit and wisdom about to flash in rapid coruscations from the stars which formed it, was not to be thought of! His conscience told him that, in acting thus, he should be little better than a thief, who, "from a shelf the precious diadem stole and put it in his pocket." His embarrassment was most painful, and gladly would he at that moment have exchanged all the glories of Mrs. Gibson's back drawing-room, for a seat on the bank of

turf in the orchard at Maplebury, beside his own little humble worshipper, Bessy.

Whether his shyness or his honour would have got the better in this struggle had it been continued, can never be known; for Marchmont, on accidentally turning his head, perceived him, and immediately put an end to it by saying,

“My dear friend, you have forgotten our young stranger! Now then, put your table to the proof, and bid it stretch itself to make room for him.”

This command was instantly obeyed; and with the more promptitude, perhaps, because it was quite out of the common way for Mr. Marchmont, while enjoying the petting of which he had boasted, to give himself any trouble about the accommodation of others; his sagacious friend therefore immediately suspected that her favourite had some especial reason for this remarkable condescension. Nor was she in any degree mistaken.

Marchmont, while his eye seemed directed only towards Marvel, had not failed to observe the ardent, eager, admiring gaze of the young head peeping from behind him. It was precisely the expression he loved best to see in those who listened to him. Moreover, he had not forgotten that the youth had been presented to him as one vehemently desirous of seeing himself in print, and likewise as being blessed with friends and protectors whose names seemed to promise profitable patronage.

Charles Chesterfield, therefore, not only found himself honoured beyond the reach of hope, by obtaining a seat near the elastic table, but was asked to drink wine by Mr. Marchmont himself, and more than once felt the great man's eagle glance upon him, as he listened to the wonders of his eloquence.

CHAPTER VII.

A Tête-à-tête, and its Result—Charles Chesterfield grows Manly and Independent.

ACCORDING to the general invitation, or rather order, which he had received, Charles Chesterfield made his appearance very punctually at Sir George Meddows's breakfast-table on the following morning. Miss Meddows was the only one of the family who had as yet entered the room, and she received the young man's bashful salutation with more condescension and civility than she had yet shown him. She even put aside the book she was reading, as if to converse with him. But though he saw this, and felt quite certain that he ought to say something, he could not manage it. No single word occurred to him, that he thought proper and fitting for the occasion; and he therefore stood before her, blushing like a rosebud, and as silent as the tomb.

This was not what the young lady intended; and she therefore, after desiring him to seat himself, addressed him with a smile of so much sweetness, that could he have been left alone the moment after, with pen, ink, and paper, it is probable he would have produced something or other, upon lips and eyes, more spirited than all he had ever written on these inspiring subjects before. But it was many minutes before all this gentle condescension produced on Charles the effect intended; or, in other words, it was long before the young man dared trust his nerves with the sound of his own voice.

At length, however, upon Clara's asking him if he still thought he should find any thing in the gloomy streets of London, to atone for the pure air and green fields he had left behind, such an effect followed, as showed she had touched that point in his character where the shyness of rustic breeding was overpowered by a stronger feeling. It was like finding at last the secret spring by whose agency alone some hidden treasure can be brought to view, when, after in vain touching here, and pressing there, the right spot being found at last, out starts the hoarded wealth before the seeker's eyes.

"Atone!" reiterated Charles, totally unconscious of the freedom required to justify such an echo-like mode of colloquy. "Miss Meddows! Should I ever be driven to consider the country, its blue sky, and its green fields, its scented blossoms—which in truth I fondly love—and its balmy air; should I, Miss Meddows, be ever forced to consider these as blessings only to be enjoyed by sacrificing those which have already opened before me in London, I should learn to tremble at their name, and shudder at every idle image of rural beauty which memory might suggest."

Not only the words, but the manner of this vehement speech, startled the young lady considerably. The countenance of Charles Chesterfield, though as yet a little too blooming in its sunny freshness to suggest any idea of great refinement, was, nevertheless, exceedingly handsome. Though with no pretensions whatever to be accounted as one of those "sublime sort of Newton-faced men" for whom some ladies are inclined to feel a decided partiality, he had fine regular features, and, better still, considerable power of expression; so that when looking at him, as Clara Meddows did at that moment, while his whole soul was in his eyes, and the most genuine enthusiasm animating his countenance, it was impossible not to acknowledge that he was both handsome and intelligent. She felt surprised, and probably looked so; for without quite losing the animation which had for a while so completely overthrown his timidity, he added, "Forgive me, Miss Meddows! I did not mean to frighten you by the impetuous

expression of my feelings, and nothing but the great kindness of your manner could have led me to express them at all. It is difficult, I believe, amidst circumstances so very new as those in which I find myself, to speak of one's real feelings without falling into this error."

"Sincerity can never be an error, Mr. Chesterfield," she replied; "but I should betray the want of it, did I not confess that I still feel doubtful of the wisdom of your preference of the town to the country."

"I, too, love sincerity, Miss Meddows," he rejoined, very ingenuously, "and it is for that very reason that I own so freely the preference I avow. It seems to myself almost unnatural that a few, a very few hours, spent with a man of extraordinary intellect, should make me feel for him as I do. I would rather cultivate this man's society, though the doing so should condemn me to find my home where I could never see the sun, than be debarred from association and fellowship with him and his, though I should gain thereby the brightest heaven and the purest air that God ever gave to man."

All this, though uttered very rapidly, was not got through without abundance of blushes, and such vehement palpitation of the heart as he had never felt before. "Whether for good or for evil," thought Clara, "it is clear that this poor youth is destined to fret his hour upon the stage to which my father has transported him! Can it be," and the idea brought with it such pleasure as made her eagerly cherish it,—"can it be that in this business I have mistrusted my poor father wrongfully? Can it be that, having no such vile thoughts as I suspected, he has seen in this boy that which I see now? If so, he may have been led solely by his habitual love of speculation to invite him hither, in the belief that he really had talents which might push their way to fortune."

For the moment which it took for these meditations to pass through the active brain of Clara, her companion remained with his eyes almost unconsciously fixed on her face; for, as her own bright glances were for the interval settled upon the carpet, he was so far enabled to forget himself and his timidity as to look steadily at her, which, in truth, he had never done before, having ever turned his own eyes from encountering hers, with the startled shyness of a young leveret, who bounds away in terror the instant he encounters a human glance.

But now that at last he did really venture to contemplate her face, wonder seemed to conquer fear, and a feeling made up of curiosity and admiration caused him to speculate as he gazed upon the possibility of approaching to such a degree of acquaint-

ance with her as might enable him to submit to the "divine intelligence" he read upon her brow the outpouring of his muse. The sudden start which her looking up occasioned might have convinced her, had she thought about it, that his reverie had been as active as her own; but the new and very pleasant view which she had now taken of the young man's sudden introduction to the family made her too anxious to atone to her father, in the person of his guest, for the evil thoughts with which she charged herself, to permit her to remark it; and, with still increased friendliness of manner, she said, "And who was it, Mr. Chesterfield, who pleased you so greatly at Mrs. Gibson's party last night?"

"It was Mr. Marchmont," he replied, colouring with eagerness, and literary pride, at having such a name to mention.

Had Clara cared a little more about Charles Chesterfield, she would have heaved a sigh perhaps at hearing this name; but, as it was, she only knit her beautiful brows the least in the world, and replied,

"Oh! the editor of the *Regenerator*."

"Yes, I believe that is the name of the work. I know he is editor of a weekly publication in very high estimation. Mr. Gibson was kind enough to whisper this to me, but I did not catch the name very distinctly."

"The *Regenerator* is his paper," rejoined the young lady, "at least if you are right as to the name of the gentleman."

"In that I am sure I have made no mistake," replied Charles eagerly, "for it was repeated very often. Do you know him, Miss Meddows?"

"No, I do not," was the reply.

Charles longed to tell her that if her charming countenance did not belie the soul within, the sooner she made the acquaintance the better; but even had he had the boldness to utter such a speech, there was no time for it, for at that moment Mrs. Longuéville entered, and, in a minute after, Sir George Meddows himself.

Mrs. Longuéville's first movement on seeing young Chesterfield was a very stiff one, which, even before it had passed away, was singularly enough contrasted with the bland smile which the recollection of her brother's instructions concerning him produced.

"Good morning, Mr. Chesterfield," said she, in mood the second. "We quite missed you at breakfast yesterday." Then sweeping past him, and placing her cheek close to that of Clara, as if to receive half a French salute, she whispered in her ear, "What an incredible bore!" in mood the first.

"That's right, Charles! we have got you again, have we?"

cried Sir George, joyously saluting the shoulders of the young man with his spread hand, as he entered. "Are you not a fine fellow? and did I not prophecy rightly? Just one day and a quarter in London, and two invitations already! Ring the bell, Clara—I am famishing—settling accounts ever since nine this morning."

Charles flew to the bell with new-born alacrity, of which Clara's condescension was the mother. She bowed to him as she placed herself at the table, while her father exclaimed,

"Oh, to be sure—I had forgot—that is quite right, Charles—nature has made you a genius, and we must make you a gentleman."

Poor Charles coloured deeply at his implied deficiencies; but the coffee and rolls entered, every one became occupied, and he felt almost at ease as he half bowed, half nodded, a smiling assent to Clara, when she held out a cup, and said,

"Sugar, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"We have a dinner to-day, haven't we?" demanded Sir George.

"Yes, papa, the Wilmots, Beaumonts, and Wakefields were invited for to-day, before we left town at Easter—and," pulling out from her bag a little ivory tablet, "Lord Icelington, Captain Tolwell, and Sir William Crawley also."

"Does not Dalrymple dine here?" asked Sir George, sharply.

"I hope you have neither of you been rude to him? It struck me that he went away very early last night. You do not think he is affronted at any thing, Amelia, do you?"

"Indeed, no!" replied Mrs. Longuéville, "I think it is quite too impossible. I am sure you are always kindness itself to him, Sir George."

"And I would have every body else kindness itself to him," returned the baronet. "What on earth, Clara, could induce you to omit sending him a card for to-day?"

"It was not omitted, papa," said Miss Meddows, colouring, "and I dare say he intends to dine here."

"Upon my word, Clara, for a girl so thoroughly well brought up as you have been, you have the very oddest way of doing and saying things; but it's no matter—if the invitation was sent, it is all very well. Chesterfield, here is an egg, if you like to have it—I shall not eat another. I say, Charles, what do you mean to do with yourself to-night?"

"I know of nothing for to-night, Sir George."

"No? that's unlucky, too; because, my dear fellow, you'll observe it is rather a particular sort of party that I expect here to-day, and I don't think it would suit you to be one of them at all. You would find it a monstrous bore—such formal quizzes! But I'll tell you what you can do though, and no bad notion

either—you shall stick to the solidities at luncheon to-day—there's always mutton-chops, or beef-steaks, or something of that sort, you know, about two o'clock—and then, if you have a mind, you can go into the pit of one of the play-houses to-night. I'll ask Dalrymple to let his valet go with you—he is out of livery, you know, and a very decent fellow to look at, with a fifty times smarter-looking coat, my dear boy, if the truth must be spoken, than your own, Charles.”

Miss Meddows coloured, and cast a glance at her father that certainly did not speak approbation. Charles Chesterfield, too, changed countenance—but this time it was no blush of shyness that altered his complexion. He became considerably paler than usual; and as he remembered how very little the lessons or the converse of the good vicar had prepared him for the companionship of grooms, he was strongly urged by the best part of the spirit within him, to sacrifice all the hopes which the protection of Sir George fostered, by boldly telling him that his proposal showed such ignorance of the gentle craft to which, though with all humility, he conceived himself to belong, that the only way to answer it was, by withdrawing himself from his presence for ever. How far such a reply might have affected the future destiny of the young man, it is impossible to say; for it was not written in the book of fate that it should be spoken. From her father, the eyes of Miss Meddows turned upon Charles, and there was enough of sympathy in their expression both to sooth his anger and satisfy his pride. He returned the glance by one that said very plainly, “I thank you,” and then his colour again changed, and once more with the glowing cheeks of a country lad, whose shyness left no power either to resent or to reason, he replied,

“No, thank you, sir, I had rather stay at home—in my own lodgings, I mean,” he added quickly, “for I wish to spend this evening in writing to my family.”

“That's very well then,” said his patron, perfectly satisfied; and after a little unmeaning talk between the brother and sister, for Clara did not speak another word, the breakfast-table broke up, Sir George retiring to his library, Mrs. Longuéville to her boudoir, and Clara to a small third drawing-room which was held to be very sacredly her own. Sir George was the first to leave the room, and before Mrs. Longuéville had quite followed him, Clara, who alone had not yet risen from her chair, said, “Mr. Chesterfield, before you go out, let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my morning sitting-room. If you have made no other engagement for two o'clock, I can give you a ticket for the Royal Institution, where you would hear a lecture that would, I think, interest you.”

Mrs. Longuéville stood still as soon as her niece began to speak, and therefore heard, as the young lady intended she should, every word she said. Charles replied with equal simplicity and earnestness, "I am very much obliged to you."

"Come then!" added Clara, "and I will show you the way to my sanctum."

So saying, she rose, and slipped on, Charles following her; while Mrs. Longuéville, her eyes wide open in unmitigated astonishment, stood aside to let them pass, exclaiming in an undertone, "*Incroyable!*"

Arrived in her sitting-room with her surprised but greatly flattered companion, Miss Meddows neither seated herself nor invited her guest to be seated; but having given him the promised ticket, and explained to him the nature of the institution, she took from her book-shelves a very conveniently-arranged map of London, which a sharp-witted observer might perhaps have guessed, from its evidently untouched condition, had been procured on purpose, and pointing out with very patient goodnature the situation of Albemarle-street, and its relative position both as to Bruton and South Molton streets, said, "This map will, I think, enable you, with very little trouble, to find your way about London. Do keep it, Mr. Chesterfield. Good morning."

It was very judicious, and quite right in the young lady, to make the ceremony of dismissal thus clear; for the feeling of fear, very nearly amounting to dislike, which Charles had previously conceived towards the haughty-looking beauty was fast melting away before her pitying kindness; and instead of wishing to get out of her way as speedily as possible, as heretofore, he would very fain have sat down once more in her presence, and led her to speak again as she had spoken in the morning. But there was no danger that he should mistake her farewell for a permission to stay, neither did he; but after silently holding the ticket and the map in his hand for one moment, as if meditating how much he might express of the feelings that filled his heart, he said, with a *naïveté* that well became him, "Indeed, and indeed, this is very kind of you, Miss Meddows!"

It was very kind, and seasonably so, for without this agreeable circumstance the day would have been very shapeless and very melancholy to poor Charles. As it was, he did very well, not troubling the substantial luncheon of Sir George, which would have interfered with the lecture, but with a spirit of independence, of which he felt rather proud, he entered a shop as he returned from Albemarle-street, whose window showed forth the promise of a dinner, and then returned to his lodgings with a sufficient stock of pleasant meditations and happy feelings, to last

him till he went to bed. One subject, and certainly not the least important, of these meditations, was the promised notice from Mr. Marchmont, respecting the time when it would suit that gentleman's convenience to grant him the hoped-for interview, for the purpose of discussing the great subject of his literary hopes and wishes.

But though the day wore away without his receiving this, Charles bore the delay extremely well. He really did wish to write to his mother, and to Bessy, and to his venerable friend Mr. Westbrook, and as he had much more to tell than his promised frank could possibly contain, the employment, while it lasted, was such as very effectually to chase away every feeling of *ennui*. Moreover, there had been much in Mr. Faraday's lecture to employ his mind in a manner altogether new to him, and the pleasant remembrance of Miss Meddows's altered manner so completely filled up every interval, that, instead of finding the hours lag, he was greatly surprised when he heard his landlady's clock, on the staircase, strike eleven.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Marchmont remembers Charles Chesterfield, but is compelled by the iron Hand of Necessity to remember himself first—Another *Tête-à-tête*, which also produces its Results.

MR. MARCHMONT, meantime, had not forgotten the *fresh-looking* young man whose admiration of him had been so evident. But notwithstanding the elevated nature of this gentleman's extraordinary mind, he was too much a man of business to involve himself in any literary transactions with the young stranger before he had made himself better acquainted with all circumstances concerning him.

To obtain such information, as well as to indulge himself in one of those hours of confidential conversation with which Mrs. Gibson occasionally honoured him, Mr. Marchmont asked and obtained permission to wait upon her the morning after her party.

In most London dwellings, the back-parlour belongs pretty exclusively to the master of the house, either as library or litter-room, as the case may be; but in the Gibson family it was otherwise, for it belonged *quite* exclusively to the mistress of it. It was here that she carried on the great work of her life; a work which was indeed the crowning glory of the whole Gibson race, distinguishing it most decidedly from all other races, and giving to the name, as she herself expressed it, an enduring species of celebrity, which it was delightful to remember would be advan-

tageous to her posterity when her own frail existence should be closed in death.

"I am making," she was wont to say, "an European reputation for every one who bears the name of Gibson; and it is this consideration which enables me to persevere in an enterprise which might shake the boasted courage of many of the stouter sex!"

In a word, the sacred back-parlour in Baker-street was the scene of all Mrs. Gibson's labours for the illustration of her celebrated copy of the "Paradise Lost." Unlike most other apartments of similar locality, it had been metamorphosed into the likeness of a boudoir, for the lady's use. Paper had taken the place of paint upon the walls; tall horsehair-bottomed chairs had made way for low ottomans, and for Greek and Roman *reposoirs* of all sorts and sizes. One large substantial table had been shivered, as it should seem, into half a dozen little ones, whilst sober red moreen had melted into delicate chintz, lined with rose colour; bookshelves had sunk into *chiffonnières*, and a massive old portrait of Mr. Gibson's great-grandfather, which formerly surmounted the chimney-piece, had retired before a host of his miniature descendants, all sparkling in golden frames, bedecked with wine-leaves.

But, notwithstanding all these pretty "*feminalities*," there was one spot in the room that had a sort of mysterious homeliness, which, if any one unacquainted with the secret had been permitted to enter the apartment, must have greatly puzzled him. These, however, were but few, and the well-informed knew that the green cloth curtain, suspended at the height of six feet across a portion of the room which included one window, concealed the deal board at which Mrs. Gibson performed the more laborious portion of her noble task, together with her gum-pots and brushes, her paper-shavings, and her heavy shears, her apron, her towels, and aught else that to the illustrator's art belongs. For the expense attending the collecting her illustrations had obliged her, at a very early stage of the undertaking, to perform the labour of mounting with her own hands.

Mrs. Gibson was behind the shelter of this curtain when Mr. Marchmont was announced; but, though she came forth from its shelter with an engraving from the antique in her hand, which some one had remarked to her strongly resembled the poet's description of Adam, it would have been evident to any one well acquainted with her, that she was dressed not so much with a view to pasting and gumming, as to appearing before her chosen friend with all the advantages that a morning toilet could give. She was still, notwithstanding her age, in every sense of the phrase a woman *à prétention*, and she certainly did in all ways

very much value Mr. Marchmont's admiration. There are, indeed, so very few people who think it worth their while to compliment a lady of near fifty on her personal perfections, that where such a one is found, he is generally very fully "prized at his worth," particularly if it happens, as in the case of Mrs. Gibson, that admiration of all kinds is very affectionately valued.

A truly platonic attachment between a lady and a gentleman is doubtless a fine spectacle; and where its purity can admit of no manner of question, it can hardly fail of being contemplated with delight.

"Ah, Marchmont! my presentiment did not deceive me!" said the lady, advancing to him with an extended hand. "I believe I should know your knock amidst a million!"

"How like you is that thought!" replied the gentleman, taking her hand, and leading her to the couch she usually occupied. "Never, surely, was there a heart so exquisitely formed for friendship as your own! Every nerve, every pulse, every look, every word, is replete with the delicious balm! dearest, dearest Mrs. Gibson!"

And having seated himself beside her, he placed his hands upon his eyes, while the lowness of the couch led him to support his elbows on his knees, and he remained for a minute or two perfectly silent, and, indeed, to all appearance weeping.

"My dear Marchmont, how is this? What ails you, my most valued friend? Why this emotion, Marchmont?"

"Well may you ask. It must, indeed, seem strange to you! You do not—you cannot understand it! But the most delicious feature in your character is, that sweet trustfulness which never permits suspicion to mix itself with doubt. How many are there who, on witnessing emotions they cannot understand, invariably suspect some faulty cause to be the source of them. But you—I have no words—I never did, nor ever shall, find words to express the admiration, the gratitude, the tenderness with which your character inspires me."

And, suddenly changing his position, he seized her hand with uncontrollable emotion, and pressed it to his lips.

"Ah, foolish friend!" replied Mrs. Gibson, gaily, and playfully giving him a gentle box on the ear, as soon as her hand was released; "I will not have you give way to this sort of thing. You are out of spirits, my poor Marchmont, and this leads you to a degree of thoughtless demonstration that is not good for you, my dear friend. Did I not know you, as I *do* know you, what might I not think? Come, come, no more of this! you have positively made me feel as foolish as a child—I am ashamed of it—I am, indeed!"

“Ah! do not chide your own dear gentle nature!” he replied, in a tone of almost reproachful deprecation. “What think you would be the destiny of spirits such as mine, if woman shut her heart to sympathy? Yet, mistake me not—perfect, all perfect as you are, mistake me not! Conceive not, I implore you, that in speaking of the sympathy of woman, I mean the childish softness of a puling girl. To a soul like mine there is no charm in this. No! For me to feel consolation from a woman’s friendship, it is necessary, absolutely necessary, that she should have a mind completely developed, with faculties in full-grown perfection, and a steadfast heart, that knows itself, nor trembles to confess that it can feel. Heaven has no blessing like such a friend as this—earth no joy like that she has the power to bestow.”

There was naturally a pause at the end of this speech. In fact, whenever any very highwrought and sublime emotions are uttered, by persons like Mr. Marchmont and Mrs. Gibson, it is absolutely necessary that a pause should follow. It is not only good in itself, being often, indeed, more expressive than any language, but it acts in a wonderful manner upon what has gone before, sublimating what was trivial, softening what was abrupt, and, in fact, permitting each party in the dialogue to fill up the spoken sketch of the soul’s feelings according to their own heart’s content.

It was, on this occasion, Mrs. Gibson who first broke the impressive silence.

“Marchmont!” she said, “you are the only being living who ever thoroughly understands me. I am sought and esteemed by many friends, perhaps beloved by some—but alas! how graceless is the heart in these matters! Neither the world, nor the world’s law, however strictly we may wish to follow it, can keep the erratic soul from roaming where it list. In short—but let us quit this theme, my poor friend; we know not whither such speculations may lead us. Believe me, it is wisest, best, on some occasions, not to turn the mind’s eye too searchingly inward:

‘No more,
Enthusiast! do we soar:
This sweetly maddening dream of soul
May hurry us beyond the goal!’”

And then, withdrawing the hand which Mr. Marchmont had seized at the moment when he was describing the particular sort of ladies of whom he wished to make friends, she added,

“Come! let us talk a little about Mr. Pendergrass. He is your friend, and he shall do you a friend’s service, by rousing you from the state of almost morbid sensibility into which those lan-

guid eyes but too plainly tell me you have fallen. Say, Marchmont, do you often see this highly-gifted man?"

A very deep sigh preceded Mr. Marchmont's reply to this; but at length he said, with somewhat of a fretful accent, "Oh dear, yes! I see him very often, of course."

"It is a great privilege, Marchmont!—whether it were that your most peculiar manner of recitation gave the charm, or that the lines themselves were indeed most exquisite, I hardly know: but to me there appeared a depth of feeling and a force of thought in the verses you spoke last night, which are very rarely found combined in any other. I wish you would bring him here, my dearest friend."

"I will do that, or any thing else that you will bid me do. But to be quite frank with you—it is a fact that you will not like his verses so well if he recites them himself. However, his coming here may be desirable, if you, and Almeria, and all the rest of you, take care to make it known that all his best things are sent to *The Regenerator*.

"Of course, dearest Marchmont! Fear not my memory there. You will bring him then on my next Tuesday? I own it will give me pleasure."

"Yes. In your case, my charming Mrs. Gibson, there can be no objection to this; for so admirably do you arrange your *soirées*, that scarcely a word is heard but may be recorded on both sides of the Atlantic with advantage to you and yours. But you are aware, I suppose, of Pendergrass's peculiarity? I feel it absolutely a matter of duty to mention it."

"No, indeed. I have never seen him, you know, and have not the slightest idea to what you allude," returned Mrs. Gibson, looking rather terrified.

"Nay, to you it could certainly never be injurious. On the contrary, indeed, as your friendship for me so frequently leaves it in my power to lead the conversation here, I am by no means certain that the circumstance of which I speak may not be highly desirable. The fact is, however, that Pendergrass has adopted the habit, which I believe he considers to be most legitimately a literary one, of printing and publishing whatever he hears and sees in society.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, either feeling or affecting great alarm.

"Nay, my sweet friend, there is nothing to frighten *you* in this."

"I don't know, Marchmont," she replied, with trembling emotion. "To a woman whose feelings are so overpowering as mine, whose heart, I fear me, is in her eyes, and who, when ani-

mated by conversation, thinks only of the person she addresses, or the subject they discuss—to such a one, Marchmont, it must surely be dangerous to be so keenly noted.”

“Should I not watch over you?” demanded Mr. Marchmont, in an accent of tender reproach.

“Then bring him,” she replied, laying her hand gently on his arm, and fixing her eyes on his with a look that seemed to say, “Forgive me!” Then added, in a whisper hardly audible, “If you see no objection, there can be none.”

Having again kissed the lady’s fingers, Mr. Marchmont rose rather abruptly from his seat, and paced the apartment with a sort of hasty and unequal step, which unequivocally spoke agitation. Mrs. Gibson watched him for a minute or two, and then she also became rather agitated, and, it may be, did not exactly know what her dear friend was going to say next; but, after making about five turns and a half in this alarming manner, he stopped short immediately opposite to her, and said,

“Yet, after all, my beloved friend! I came not hither this morning to talk of Pendergrass. Alas! there is a subject that was wont to touch you nearer. Ah! let me not find you changed?”

“What mean you, Marchmont? Speak!” she replied, turning her eyes from his face upon the ground.

“May I speak, sweet friend! and be quite sure to find you still, still the same? Still my own dearest best-loved friend?”

“Gracious Heaven! Can you doubt it? What is it that you came prepared to say? Speak, Marchmont! Speak! Your manner makes me tremble.”

“My most dear Mrs. Gibson!” he replied solemnly, and reseating himself beside her, “I come to speak to you of—myself!”

“And is that a theme, Marchmont, on which you can doubt my willing ear?” demanded the lady, plaintively, but with recovered composure.

“I should indeed be a wretch if I could think so,” he replied, striking his forehead with exactly that degree of vehemence which always gives rise to inquietude in a tender female breast, lest the brow, or the hand, or both, should be the worse for the concussion.

“Be tranquil, Marchmont! For Heaven’s sake speak not, act not with this vehemence,” she said; “you know not how you shake me! Tell me gently, tell to your best and truest friend what heavy sorrow lies upon your heart. Have I the power to aid you, Marchmont?”

“Alas! I know not—and that doubt tortures me.”

Again Mrs. Gibson looked alarmed. “I know I may trust your principles—your true affection, Marchmont,” she said. “You

have taught me to feel assured of this, even in the most trying moments, and therefore I scruple not to declare, that you shall not find the friendship I have so often pledged to you wanting—ask what—ask any thing you will!”

“Can you lend me twenty pounds?” he cried, mournfully, and once more taking her hand in his. “Can you, my friend? Can you do this? Speak! my very life hangs on your answer.”

“Your life, Mr. Marchmont? Good gracious! how can that be?” replied Mrs. Gibson, in a tone certainly a good deal changed.

“I see it—I feel it!—I know it!” cried the impassioned gentleman, again starting from his seat, and resuming his long stridings across the room. “I looked to find an angel, and lo! a mortal answers me! I am a fool! Ay, children may point at me! That I, I who have for years bent all the force of my genius to dive into the secret depths of the human heart, that I should have been ever hoodwinked thus! Good morning, Mrs. Gibson,” he added, with the enforced composure of one who taxes his strength to the utmost, in order to subdue feelings that are too mighty for him. “Good morning! all happiness attend you! It may be that we shall not meet again. If so,” and here his voice perceptibly faltered,—“if so, never quite forget me. I have faults, great and manifold; but there is something here,” laying his hand on his heart, “there is something here that should plead for me!—at least to you!” And so saying, he turned away, and moved towards the door with a hurried and faltering step.

“Stay! Marchmont! stay!” exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, starting up, and vehemently laying hold upon him. “This precipitation is equally cruel and unwise. Nay, you shall not go! How could you so mistake me! What have I done, what said, to justify your doubts? Presuming that I have not twenty pounds in the world that I can at this moment lay my hands upon, without my—I mean without any body’s being applied to for it, does it thence follow that my heart is false to friendship?—or that I am not ready with all the little aid I can?” And, as she spoke, Mrs. Gibson drew from her pocket a small bunch of little Bramah-looking keys.

These last words, or the act which accompanied them—or both, seemed in some degree to still the tempest which raged within him, and Mr. Marchmont turned upon her a look of so much melancholy gentleness, that her heart quite melted within her as she gazed upon him.

“Dear Marchmont!” she exclaimed anew, with all her wonted pleasure in the name. “That look is your own again! Never let me see you more with such an aspect as you wore but now;

"I cannot stand it!" And Mrs. Gibson laid down the little Bramah-looking keys upon the table, and drew out her pocket-handkerchief, in which she buried her face, while her breast heaved convulsively.

"Enchanting friend! Sweet softness!" cried Mr. Marchmont, hastily. "But lose not time. These moments are most precious to me! And, beyond all else, remember—just now you seemed about to name your husband. Hear me, my precious, dearest, confidant! Hear me, and remember, the confidence reposed by friendship is the most sacred trust that man can give, or woman can receive! Remember this—and let no human eye peep at my hidden sorrows, save only hers whose privilege it is to read every secret of my soul." As he uttered these impressive words, Mr. Marchmont took up the little keys and placed them in the hand of his friend.

Mrs. Gibson immediately took the hint, and without further delay opened the drawer of a secretary-table, and drew thence both a pocket-book and a purse.

"Sit down beside me, Marchmont, for a moment," said she, that I may tell you exactly how I am situated. Mr. Gibson is really very kind and liberal; but our expenses are enormously large, and therefore it often happens that money which he gives me solely for my personal expenses goes to pay some clamorous trades-people, whose long-standing bills, I know, cannot be immediately paid by him. This is the reason why at this present moment I have but eleven pounds and a few shillings in my privy purse; but if this trifle can be useful to you, my dear friend, need I say that you will make me most happy by taking it? Need I tell you that it is already yours, more than ever it was my own?"

It would perhaps be superfluous to follow the history of this transaction any further. Few will doubt that the offering was accepted, or that a good deal of hand-kissing and benediction followed it. This ended, the pocket-book and purse locked up again, and the parties reseated with tolerable composure on the sofa, the conversation turned on Charles Chesterfield, and the possible use that might be made of his devotion to the muses.

"It will suit me exceedingly well," said Mr. Marchmont, "to have a youth in my employ of his very excitable temperament. I marked the effect of all I said on him last night, and if he rhymes or writes in any way with facility, I am persuaded that I shall be able to make him exceedingly useful; for it is quite evident that he would be perfectly contented to listen to my thoughts, and to indite them from morning till night. Those are the sort of contributors I like. It renders the moral tone of the work more homogeneous, yet admits of every variety of style. But there is

one thing concerning this youth which I must leave in charge with you, my dearest friend, to discover for me—begging you to remember that it is of the most vital importance that I should obtain correct information concerning it. Can you learn for me, by means of your acquaintance with the ladies of the Meddows family, whether the young man is under circumstances of pecuniary pressure? That he will be ultimately paid—that is, if he produces any thing deserving payment—you will not, of course, my dear friend, for a moment doubt; but from peculiar circumstances in my affairs, it will be a great convenience to me to delay the payment a little. Do you think you could get this information for me? could you learn whether it is probable that he will bother me about payment?"

"Almeria can, I have no doubt. She makes a prodigious fuss about her friendship for Miss Meddows, and is, I know, going to call upon her in a day or two," replied Mrs. Gibson with zealous eagerness.

"That will do excellently well. Your sweet Almeria, who, by the way, is the only one of your family who I can allow to be called in the slightest degree like you,—Almeria is always my friend. And now we are on that theme, my very dearest Mrs. Gibson, I will venture to say a word or two to you concerning your daughter, Marianne. I really wish you would use your maternal influence to check the sort of sarcastic humour in which she sometimes indulges. I do assure you, it is very disagreeable to me, trifling and unimportant as it may appear."

"I grieve to hear you say so, my dear Marchmont; for, to tell you the honest truth, I do not know how to prevent it. That her manners, particularly to you, are perfectly detestable, I am quite ready to allow; but they say, you know, that there are secrets in all families, and there is something a little of that sort respecting Marianne. We never mention the circumstance, because we think it would be a disadvantage to her sisters, but Marianne, unfortunately, is perfectly independent of us all. An uncle of Mr. Gibson's having taken a fancy to her, when she was a child, most injudiciously left her twenty thousand pounds entirely at her own disposal—which, as Mr. Gibson's estate unhappily goes to the male heir, is quite as much as her four sisters will have between them. It is very provoking that the stupid old gentleman should have fixed upon her instead of Almeria, for she is totally without talent of any kind, and so full of old-fashioned notions about what is right and what is wrong, that she disapproves of every thing we do or say. One of her absurd fancies is, that she wants us to live all the year round in the country. Imagine! But, notwithstanding all this, she pays four hundred

a-year for her board, so of course I cannot scold her and school her as I would another girl. I find the best way is to take very little notice of any thing she says, for she is so queer sometimes that if we did not pretend not to hear her, it would be almost impossible to avoid quarrelling."

"Twenty thousand pounds!" said Mr. Marchmont.

"Yes, indeed. Is it not a pity?" replied Mrs. Gibson.

"I wonder, my dear friend, that you never mentioned this fact to me before," said the Regenerator, musingly. "It might have made an important difference in the tone of my reception by her."

"We never mention it to any body, dear Marchmont, never!" returned the lady, with great earnestness. "We think it quite a duty not to do it."

"But am I *any* body?" said Mr. Marchmont, in a tone of deep feeling, and fixing on her an appealing look that went to her very heart.

"Ah! you are right! But you see I have told you now! With you, Marchmont, I can have no intentional concealments," was the penitent reply.

"Now then, farewell! Make your Almeria understand her commission, best and dearest! I shall not appoint the young man to call till I know the result of it. You will not neglect this. I know you will not."

Having said this he departed, leaving Mrs. Gibson in a flutter of spirits that made the retirement of her 'study' extremely desirable, though not even the sedative influence of guaranteed repose could for some time restore the calmness and tranquil self-possession which she felt it her duty to assume.

CHAPTER IX.

The Gibson Estimates of Clara Meddows—A confidential Mission—Miss Almeria's Declaration of Friendship—The Regenerator ascertains an essential Fact.

MRS. GIBSON was quite right when she said that her daughter Almeria made a prodigious fuss about her friendship for Miss Meddows. It had been the fashion in the Gibson family, at least among the female part of it, to pronounce rather an unfavourable judgment upon that young lady; Mrs. Gibson declaring her to be by far the most presuming young person she had ever seen; the two eldest Miss Gibsons being of opinion, the one, that she was a young woman of no reading whatever, and the other, that her conversational powers were much below mediocrity; while the filial Theodosia declared, that it was perfectly painful to watch her conduct to her father, of whom in society she rarely took any

notice at all, or, if she did, it was only in the same manner as she might address any other gentleman. Marianne, of course, had no voice at all in the matter, but Almeria, the high-minded enthusiastic Almeria, distinguished herself on this occasion by differing from them all.

“You are wrong, you are quite wrong!” she said. “You none of you understand Clara Meddows, no, not one! She is a creature full of intelligence. I do not mean to assert that her faculties are developed in the same degree as ours have been, and I must say that it shows want of judgment, or want of candour, to expect this. Remember, all of you, just remember the sort of set in which we live. Merciful Heaven! There are beings in our circle who might

‘Create a soul under the ribs of death!’

and can we wonder that the souls of others have not ripened and expanded themselves as our own have done? Fie! fie upon such unjust reasoning! Clara Meddows, in mind, manners, temperament, and disposition, is exactly what a fair and liberal judge of human nature, accustomed to study it under all varieties of influence, would expect—nay, even admire.”

“I know not what you mean by *expecting*, Almeria, as applied to her,” replied the eldest, and most metaphysical, Miss Gibson. “For my own part, I can very correctly assure you, that it is impossible, and altogether contrary to my analytical habits of mind, that *I* should ever have expected any thing beyond the most uninteresting mediocrity from such a formation as hers. Where is the deep-set eye? Where the lines of thought, stamped deep, even in youth, when intellect o’erbears the yielding frame in which it is immured? Where the wild roving of the upward glance? Where the fixed stillness of abstracted thought? Oh! it is monstrous in a form like hers, precisely fitted for the fabled haunts where Mussulmans have lodged their soulless beauties, to expect intelligence, or rather any other mental attribute that might bring her within reach of my regard.”

“I differ altogether from you on this matter, Sophy,” rejoined Almeria: “and as it is the privilege of all here, as in every other intellectual community, to follow their own will and their own whim in all things, I shall take the liberty of cultivating the friendship of Clara Meddows most assiduously. There is something, too, in the character of her father that interests me in a degree that seems to have a mixture of fatality in it. He is, I acknowledge, a man of fashion, and a man of the material world—I see, I know all this—I know, too, how little such a one has a right to approach the charmed circle within which burns the eternal sacred fire of mind. And yet, notwithstanding all this,

there are in Sir George Meddows flashes of intellect which, even at the very moment I perceive them, I feel certain would not appear the same to others. This is what I call fatality," added Almeria, shaking her head with a sort of impatient movement, which seemed to indicate the consciousness of being under an influence more powerful than was quite consistent with her peace of mind, or the consistency of her character.

"Sir George Meddows is a widower, isn't he?" asked Marianne, raising her eyes from the book which she was reading, with that peculiarly stupid look which had doubtless been one of the principal causes of the low estimation in which her abilities were held throughout the family. Almeria, of course, took no notice of this most absurd and irrelevant remark, but, returning again to the theme of her strong affection for Clara, again declared it to be her intention to cultivate an intimacy with her by every means in her power, and without paying the slightest attention to the opinion of any one else on the subject.

No wonder, therefore, that Mrs. Gibson, within a day or two of this conversation, should declare that her daughter Almeria made a fuss about Miss Meddows. She certainly did make a fuss about her.

It will be readily believed that the evening visits of Mr. Marchmont to the Gibson drawing-rooms were not confined to the hebdomadal parties which were given there throughout the London season. On the contrary, it rarely happened that for any two evenings together he was ever absent from them—there were so many things that naturally and almost inevitably brought "the Gibsons" and himself together! In the first place, it was for the most part through his friendly hands that Mrs. Gibson was supplied with that incredible mass of engravings, lithographs, and sometimes even original drawings, by which her celebrated copy of "Paradise Lost" had already swollen into seventeen very thick volumes; her intention being, under his advice, to continue this "labour of love," as she enthusiastically called it, till she had brought it up to twenty-four. It was impossible, with such commissions to execute, that constant consultations could be dispensed with. And then it was such pleasure to him to see his fair friends press round him to glean such scraps of editorial intelligence as he ventured to indulge them with, that it would have been strange indeed had he refused to indulge them.

"People talk of being *au courant du jour*," said Mrs. Gibson to her daughters one night after Mr. Marchmont had left them, "as if the being so was sufficient to ensure success in society. But what should we feel, dear girls, were he no more? Conceive the difference! How constantly we get at the character of every

thing before it sees the light! No *débutante*, in any walk, appears, of whom we know not how the majority of the press will speak long before their reporters have even seen her. No sooner is a book advertised, than we know (don't we, dears?) what sort of treatment it will receive. All this is delicious, unappreciable! It is honour, glory, happiness, all in one. Never, never, can we be grateful enough to Marchmont for the steady unvarying friendship which has placed us upon the eminence on which we stand! It should never be forgotten by either of us for a single instant."

With such feelings between the parties, it was hardly possible they could meet too often, and it was with vastly more pleasure than surprise that, notwithstanding the long morning visit which has already been described, Mrs. Gibson saw her friend return again at rather an early hour in the evening of the same day.

"Don't you think I had better bring my nightcap with me next time?" he said, with a sort of tender playfulness, as no less than five fair hands were extended to greet him. "You will decidedly think I mean to live here."

"Is it possible you can come too often?" demanded Mrs. Gibson.

"Oh, he knows how delighted we all look when he enters!" said one daughter, "only he affects to be modestly unconscious of it."

"Come and sit here in your own corner," said another.

"Do you come to tell us of any thing new?" cried a third, eagerly.

"Whether he does, or does not, we shall be sure to learn something," said a fourth; while the ill-mannered Marianne, upon whom, for some reason or other, Mr. Marchmont had happened to fix his eyes, yawned without even the civility of attempting to conceal it. But he was too high-minded to be affected by any thing of the kind, and, turning to her far different sister, replied,

"My business to-night—for I positively have business—is with Miss Almeria. May I, *sans faire un scandale*, petition for five minutes' *tête-à-tête* with her in the back drawing-room? See what you get by spoiling me as you all do!"

"You may do any thing, Marchmont, in this house; and that I hope you know, without my telling you," said Mrs. Gibson, warmly.

"Ever the same!—And what says the fair Almeria? But how dare I, ungrateful! to express a doubt, when that dear ready movement has so sweetly answered me?" And, having made this speech, he followed the young lady, who was already tripping before him, to the retirement of the favourite sofa, leaving more

than one fair one behind who would have greatly liked to have been the chosen she. Not, however, that either of them had the slightest suspicion that the requested interview was of that interesting nature which would indicate a preference leading to any very important results; but Mr. Marchmont was so great a favourite among them that *any* notice from him might be considered as enviable.

He left not his friend Almeria long in doubt as to the nature of the conversation he sought for.

“My dear girl,” he said, “I believe it is in your power to do me a great service. May I now, as ever, reckon upon your generous friendship?”

“Most assuredly you may,” she replied. “I am sure there is nothing that I would not gladly do for you.”

“You are intimate with the daughter of Sir George Meddows, are you not, my dear Almeria?” demanded the confidential celebrity.

“Oh yes! I am very well acquainted with her—I may say, very intimately,—she is a great favourite of mine.”

“Then will you, with as little delay as possible, learn from her every particular she may happen to know respecting the young man who was here last night? This information is important for me.”

“Charles Chesterfield, I suppose you mean? The young author whom her father patronizes? Perhaps, Mr. Marchmont, the best way will be for me to see Sir George himself about it? If it will be of the least service to you, I will send a message into his study with the greatest pleasure, and I am quite sure he will come to me immediately. He is the most amiable and kindest-hearted man in the world, though people who are not intimate with him fancy that he is too fine for any thing of the kind. But I know to the contrary; and, if you will commission me to mention your name to him, I have not the least doubt in the world, but that he will give you every information in his power,” replied Almeria, with amiable alacrity.

“Thank you excessively, my dear Miss Almeria, but I think you do not quite understand me. Did I wish to appear in the matter, there would be no need of my troubling you about it. But you must on no account name me, if you please; just ask, as a matter of personal curiosity, whether the young man’s principal object be renown, or,—or, in plain English, whether his project is to write for bread. But I must pray you that these inquiries be addressed to the young lady, and by no means to her father. When a master hand is destined to hold together and regulate a great machine—and every popular periodical publi-

cation may most truly be so described—it is absolutely necessary that he should make himself acquainted with the nature, quality, power, and utility of every individual instrument which he employs therein. But this must not be done by going out into the market-places and highways, tearing this mysterious and oracular machine to pieces before the eyes of all men, and teaching them to comprehend the nature and management of it as well as he does himself. This would not answer, charming Almeria. There are not many young female heads that I should deem capable of following such an illustration. Not so your own, my fair and gifted girl! You understand me perfectly. Is it not so? You require no explanation of a more prosaic kind?”

This flattering appeal to the fair nuncio's acuteness was not only well-timed, but in some degree necessary, for the commission had taken a shape much less agreeable to her than the one she had herself devised; but young ladies of the class and order to which Miss Almeria Gibson belong can seldom resist an observation on the superior grasp and power of their intellect, and accordingly she gave a charmingly intellectual and intelligent smile, and said, “My dear Mr. Marchmont, you may safely trust the business to me.”

In consequence of this conversation Miss Almeria was, on the following morning, set down by the voluminous family-carriage at the door of Sir George Meddows. Clara came forth from her *sanctum* and received her in the drawing-room.

Though frequently accused of being intolerably proud, Clara Meddows seldom deserved it. There were occasions, indeed, when her feelings were of a nature that it might be difficult to describe by any other name; but this was only when approached by persons from whom she shrank as unworthy. At other times, when the coldness of her manner brought the same accusation upon her, it was as blundering as unjust, for it not unfrequently happened that it was truly the result of humility. In other cases, as when exposed to the civilities of the whole Gibson family *en masse*, it was produced by mere weariness, or a feeling of distaste, sometimes perhaps a little too supinely yielded to. But when *tête-à-tête* with Miss Almeria the case was different. This young lady was by no means a bad actress, as was decidedly proved by her obtaining sufficient influence over a mind as much superior to her own in power as is the wing of an eagle to that of a tomtit, to lead its judgment very considerably astray. Not conceiving any possible reason which should induce the young lady to declare that she had never seen any one whose good opinion she so greatly wished to obtain, besides the assigned one of her admiring and loving her very much indeed, Clara truly believed

that such was the fact ; and though she did sometimes think that she should have been better pleased had it been otherwise, the idea never crossed her mind without producing a consciousness of ingratitude and a feeling of self-reproach. But the only result of this was a more patient and gentle endurance of Miss Almeria's frequent and very tiresome visits than could have been expected by any one who knew Clara's extreme dislike to the species of annoyance produced by them.

"I will forgive my star, if it disappoints me in every thing else for a week to come!" exclaimed Almeria, as she started from the seat where she had awaited the arrival of her chosen friend. "To find you at home, and to find you alone too, is such a happiness! Oh, you cannot guess! I know you cannot. It is impossible! The having you all to myself, and knowing that you will not turn away your head to any body else. I can give you no idea what a difference that makes to me. I dare say you don't know that you discourse quite as eloquently with your eyes as with your lips. And that is saying something, too. But it is true."

"I am sure you are very kind to pay attention to my eyes, or my lips either," replied Clara, endeavouring to smile and look pleased. "I hope your mother and all the family are quite well? It is very good of you to excuse my not having called. You are all well, I hope."

"Oh yes! all quite well. Dear, dearest Miss Meddows! How I have missed you during your absence. Not, Heaven knows! that I see you very often, either, when you are in town, but the barely knowing when we drive within sight of your house that you are *there*, THERE, just in that dear spot! oh! it is a comfort past describing, greater, I am afraid, than you can have any idea of!"

"You are too kind to me, my dear Miss Gibson. Have you been reading any thing new since I saw you last?" demanded Clara with a sigh of anticipated weariness.

"Alas! dear friend! at our house, I am sorry to say, we do little else! Mamma receives so nearly the whole host of living authors (she has forty-seven upon her list) that we are absolutely obliged to read all the new things that come out, lest we should offend any of them by our negligence. Often, indeed, we have to peruse the forthcoming publications in manuscript, which, though excessively gratifying, of course, is a tremendous tax upon one's time. They do all write so dreadfully bad, one would think they did it on purpose. I own I do sometimes think, very seriously, that this is the case."

"That is suspecting them of great cruelty towards the friends

whose opinion they seek," replied Clara. "I never yet read a work in manuscript; but I can easily imagine it to be an operation very likely to be prejudicial to its power of charming. I doubt if I should have patience to get through a thousand pages or so of crabbed writing."

"The works we have to pass judgment upon are seldom of such length as that," rejoined Almeria; "and happily Mr. Marchmont is generally by to help us. But, after all, dearest Clara!—Oh! let me call you Clara! May I?—May I call you Clara?"

"Certainly you may," replied Clara, laughing.

"Then, after all, dearest Clara, let me confess to you, that notwithstanding all the charm, the *prestige*, attending the appearance of each new star in the intellectual horizon, I cannot but think, that to minds such as yours and mine, there are names, now falling into the sere and yellow leaf, equal, if not superior, to any of the present day. I know that this would be classed as pedantry by many. But tell me, is it not your feeling?"

"I believe it is," replied Clara, "that is, if I rightly understand you."

"How I adore this noble independence of thought!" cried her companion, in a sort of ecstasy. "I know not another, no, not one, who would not at the present moment shrink from such an avowal. Do me justice, I entreat you! Do justice to the glowing admiration and devoted attachment which you have yourself inspired. Be to me what I would give my right hand to be to you—the treasurer of all my inward thoughts, and the friend of my heart's most pure election?"

It was by no means easy for so quiet-mannered a person as Miss Meddows to answer this outbreak rationally, without giving more pain or more offence to the speaker than she wished to do; but, after a moment of reflection, she said,

"I wish it were in my power to deserve better so much flattering partiality. But tell me, Miss Almeria, will you, what you thought of my father's young friend, Charles Chesterfield? I feel a great deal of interest about him, and shall be very glad if he has made friends among you, and the literary circle he seems to have met at your house."

Exceedingly well pleased to have the subject of her mission thus brought forward, and the performance of it made so perfectly easy, Miss Almeria replied with even more than her usual animation of manner, that they were all enchanted with him, and could not sufficiently admire Sir George's "divine benevolence" in thus rescuing from the shade of undeserved obscurity a being so worthy to receive the cheering light of day!

"I have fifty questions to ask about him—interesting creature!"

she continued; "but before I attack you with one, you must positively promise to tell Sir George how enthusiastically I admire his goodness. Tell him, dearest Clara, that my heart swells with all the conscious pride of our glorious nature when I hear of such acts, and that when such beings as himself are the agents in them, they become ten times more lovely still. Will you tell him this, dearest Clara?"

"Upon my word I think I should spoil it, Miss Almeria," said Clara, laughing, and then blushing at the hearty sincerity of the laugh.

"It would be a great deal more gratifying if he could hear you say it himself. We are to have a small evening-party on Thursday next; will you and your family, *sans cérémonie*, give us the pleasure of your company?"

"I can answer for myself at least," replied Almeria, eagerly. "There is no party in London that I would not give up, to pass an evening in your society—nor do I at all doubt that some of the others will accompany me. And now, let me question you *un petit peu* about this gifted youth. Is he in distressed circumstances?"

"By no means, Miss Gibson," replied Clara, promptly. "On the contrary, his family are, and have been for ages, I believe, in the possession of a very comfortable estate, to which, if I mistake not the family history, this young man will succeed."

"I am so glad to hear it! Then it is not for the sake of making money that he is anxious to publish?"

"I should certainly imagine that any such expectation must be quite a secondary object; for not only is his father in easy circumstances, but the young man himself has just had some thousands left him very unexpectedly by a godmother. Oh! no. Certainly his motives for writing are not mercenary."

"A most delightful anecdote that of the godmother's legacy. For it proves decisively, as you will observe, that the poetic *estro* so clearly perceptible in his physiognomy is sustained by no sordid feeling. Pray tell Sir George, will you, that we shall all feel but too happy in seconding his generous views, by taking every opportunity of introducing him to men of letters who form our chief society." Having made this speech, and insinuated an inquiry into Sir George's morning habits, and been assured that he was very rarely visible at home before dinner, Miss Almeria Gibson departed, leaving Clara quite consoled for the interruption she had endured by the opportunity it had given her of placing poor Charles in an advantageous point of view before the eyes of those with whom he was so evidently eager to associate. Could she have guessed the result her information was likely to produce, she might have acted differently,—but in doing so, she

would have been more wise than kind ; for she would have closed upon him a prospect that, in his estimation, had more of heaven than earth in it.

CHAPTER X.

Charles Chesterfield's first Interview with his literary Patron—New Lights—Rules for philosophical Composition—Charles is shown how to write with Intensity.

HAVING received Miss Almeria's report, Mr. Marchmont despatched by the penny post the following note to Charles Chesterfield, addressed to him at his lodgings in South Molton-street, according to his own request:—

“DEAR SIR,—It was impossible for me to send to you yesterday. Alas! young man! in my situation, the human animal can no longer be considered as his own property; and in truth, before you set your feet upon the literary ladder, it will be well for you to consider whether, should you reach the top of it, as I have done, you will be content to submit yourself to the abnegation of all that is nearest to your individual self, for the sake of the world at large. But somewhat too much of this, perhaps, to one of your fine and ardent temperament. Trust me I have read your inmost soul, as is my wont; and, if you will submit yourself implicitly to my literary pilotage, you shall speedily catch the tide of public favour, and, with the favouring gale my breath can give, shall reach that haven of renown for which your spirit pants. My usual address is at the Garrick; and this, if you are ever asked for it, is the one I should wish you to give; but as our connection is likely to be of a more business-like character than could be conveniently carried on at a club, I request that you will call on me to-morrow, at eleven o'clock, at No. 95, Long-street, Golden-square. You will probably find me—but this is idle. You will find me, young man, disposed to serve you, and ever and immutably the same. “MARCHMONT.”

After having read this letter, Charles Chesterfield laid it on the table before him, and gazed upon it with fixed eyes, clasped hands, and a breast heaving under the influence of sensations equally new and violent.

“It is come!” he cried. “The moment is arrived to which I have so long been looking forward with hope that sickened from uncertainty? Yet, now it is come, I tremble as if some great danger had overtaken me. Mother! Bessy! Would you were near me! Westbrook, venerated Westbrook, too!—But no!—he would do me harm. He could not comprehend this wild tumult of gladness and of doubt.—Doubt? No, no, not doubt—I do not,

must not, will not doubt my power. It were treason to myself—

‘My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve.’

It is not power I want. What I feel working within my breast at this moment is, and must be, power. No! All I want is skill to use it rightly. Marchmont! it is from thee, the admired, the revered, the adored, that I must learn this skill. Oh! blessed chance that brought me near thee! Master and guide, I snatch thy offered hand!”

After this burst of feeling, pronounced, if not aloud, yet with articulation distinct enough to relieve the bursting fulness of his heart, Charles remained for several hours apparently very busy; for again his numerous manuscripts were all brought out, arranged, divided, classed, enveloped in different covers, and then tied together with a trembling hand, in readiness to be conveyed on the morrow to the foot of that throne to which his heart of hearts vowed its most firm allegiance. But though employed thus, apparently in very rational accordance with the business which occupied his thoughts, his mind was, in fact, in a state that very nearly approached delirium. Figures of objects and persons, generated between hope and ambition, flitted before him with a distinctness by no means indicative of mental health. More than once he totally forgot where he was, and at one time sat looking with very alarming wildness at the dusky window that looked out upon the narrow back-court, and the rickety little venetian blinds which concealed whatever abominations the three lowest panes of the said window might have disclosed, if left only to their own dustiness. Upon getting out of this reverie, during which his breast had heaved with a painful feeling of oppression, and a sort of vague notion that he was in a prison, he rose from his chair, rather alarmed at his own conscious wanderings, and, after hastily washing his face and head in cold water, and arranging his dress, set off to take his place at the dinner-table in Bruton-street. The air and the act of walking refreshed him; but the more perfectly he recovered himself, the more he became convinced that the dining with Sir George Meddows would be a trial greater than his strength could bear. The fitful civility of Mrs. Longuéville, the friendly insolence of Sir George, albeit he gave to neither the epithets they deserved, came to his memory with that sort of sensitive strength of painting, which shows that the balance between the intellectual faculties was slightly shaken, giving to imagination a preponderance more sensible than sane. Even the tranquil loveliness of Clara rose before him with a distinctness that made him start; and though

for one moment he fancied that it would be a pleasure to hear her speak to him, and to tell her that he was summoned to wait upon Mr. Marchmont on the morrow, the next made him feel that he was in no state to bear even the gentle questioning of her calm dark eye, or the friendly accents of her touching voice.

So, in a more rational manner than might at that moment have been expected from him, he knocked at Sir George's door, and told the servant that if he were asked for when the family went to dinner, he should inform them that he was going to be very busy that afternoon, and therefore could not have the honour of joining them.

This very judicious measure having been taken, he again felt relieved for a while from the sort of busy restlessness that had confused his brain, and being vastly too little "*in the body*" to require any food more substantial than air, he paused for a moment to recall a portion of the knowledge he had already acquired from Clara's map, and then set off upon a ramble through the parks. A great many pages, nay, I dare say in skilful hands a great many volumes, might be filled, by recording the thoughts which rambled and rioted through the brain of Charles Chesterfield, during the two hours thus employed; but, at the end of that time, he was decidedly better, for he felt hungry. The poor boy, notwithstanding all his hallucinations, had good sense enough to welcome this symptom very cordially, and having made his way to the same chop-house as had before supplied his wants, made a repast which might have satisfied his mother, or even the tender Bessy herself, that he was not in bad health, notwithstanding the feverish flush which still remained upon his cheek.

He slept, too, that night long and soundly; for such vehemence of feeling as he had given way to, could not be experienced, even at the age of twenty years and five months, without leaving sensations of lassitude and fatigue behind. But he awoke, lusty as an eagle, and without falling again into the feverish visions of the day before; he enjoyed, during his solitary but most happy breakfast, a series of day-dreams that brought him into precisely the state he could have wished for making his first appearance before the man to whom he was determined to resign the regulation of his future destiny. As for breakfasting in Bruton-street on that morning, he felt it to be quite as impossible as it had been to dine there the day before—and exactly for the same reason.

Ten o'clock struck, and he indulged himself in another cup of tea; but that taken, and his parcel of manuscripts once more tied a little tighter, and then again tied a little looser, for fear of cutting the paper, he began a course of promenades to the bottom of

the staircase, for the purpose of ascertaining, by the aid of his landlady's clock, how many minutes remained to complete the three-quarters past ten, which he was determined should be the moment of his setting off upon the most important expedition of his life.

The moment came, the packet was already in his pocket, his hat already in his hand, and forth he started with feelings such as only those can know who, like him, have reached the point on which all their hopes stand balanced.

His arrival at the door of No. 95, Long-street, Golden-square, was as precisely at the hour of eleven, as if his limbs had been regulated by machinery as sure-footed as that which regulates the clock of the Horse-guards.

"Is Mr. Marchmont at home?" demanded Charles, in a tone rather less clear and articulate than that in which he usually spoke, though produced with the greatest effort he had ever made to be articulate.

"What may your name be, sir, if you please?" demanded the extremely dirty female who opened the door.

"Charles Chesterfield—Mr. Charles Chesterfield," was the distinct reply.

"Perhaps, sir, you would be pleased to write it down upon a bit of card or paper, and then I should be able to tell you in half a minute whether-so-be Mr. Marchmont is at home or not."

Charles took out his pocket-book, tore a leaf from it, and wrote his name.

"You may walk into that room there, if you be minded to take a seat while I run up," said the woman: a civility which he probably owed either to his handsome face, or his evident timidity.

The obliging offer was immediately accepted, and proved to be of considerable utility to the young country stranger, for it convinced him that his own was not, by a great many degrees, the most dismal back-parlour in London.

For the first minute or two he was very profitably employed in noting this; but that interval was quite enough for the purpose, and when it was over, the absence of his messenger appeared almost intolerably long. At length, however, she re-appeared, and said,

"Yes, you may go up, young man, as soon as you please, now."

"And what room must I go to," demanded Charles, perceiving that she had no thoughts of preceding him.

"The two pair front," was the answer; and the next moment the speaker became invisible, absorbed as it were into the earth, through the dark cavity which yawned behind the stairs.

Charles immediately began to mount, and a sort of mother-wit

led him to the right door, though the instructions given had been far from appearing explicit to him. His very modest knock produced a sonorous "Come in."

Young Chesterfield opened the door, and the very inmost shrine of the temple to which he was about to devote himself appeared displayed before him. For a moment his steps faltered, and he paused, as if uncertain whether he might dare advance into a region that had so much of mystery in its aspect.

"Ah, Chesterfield! here you are. Come in, and find a chair if you can; but for Heaven's sake, don't disturb my papers!"

To find any thing in that chamber did appear to be a matter of difficulty; for had Hogarth himself desired to produce a type of disorder, his imagination could hardly have suggested any object or any disarrangement which might not there have found a model, the whole mass being moreover encrusted with such a superficies of universal dirt and dustiness, as might have revolted almost any animal, save a spider.

"I hope I do not disturb you, sir?" said Charles modestly.

"Nay, if you do, there is no help for it, Chesterfield. In the connection which we think of forming together, neither of us must ever shrink from interrupting the other. If I understand aright what Mrs. Gibson has said to me concerning your wishes, you are desirous of devoting yourself to the service of literature and the press?" said Mr. Marchmont.

"I am, sir," replied Charles, solemnly.

"No man, sir, can devote himself to a nobler course," returned the great Regenerator, with indescribable dignity. "I respect you for your high-toned ambition, and am ready, quite ready, to hold out a hand to steady your uncertain steps, and lead you forward from obscurity into light. But, in return for this, I shall of course expect that you devote your talents, whatever they may be, honestly, sincerely, and with the energy that becomes a man, to the occupations I shall place before you."

"It is my most earnest wish to do so, sir," replied Charles, eagerly; "and I hope and believe that you will not be disappointed in me."

"Do not interrupt me, young man. When you have stood a while within the sacred veil, you will become aware that we too have our mysteries, as well as viler craftsmen; and that one of these is, to permit the holder of the position in which I stand to utter his laws without crossing the promulgation of them, even by applause. You have lived greatly in retirement, I believe. Know you the great omnipotent, the one invincible, the hidden yet proclaimed, the ruler of the universal intellect, the ever-present, never-present WE?"

“Sir?” said Charles, looking more than half terrified at the wild *crescendo* energy of this speech, but assuredly not half understanding it.

Mr. Marchmont laughed. “Nay! look not so wildly, Chesterfield! For you, this autocrat, this hydra, this dragon of a thousand claws, shall be a very gentle monster. And if you deserve it, he shall pet you, my good friend, and when you wish it, he shall lend you his cloak, ay, and his dark lantern, too. It is a cloak of mail, I promise you; and the lantern, dark though it be, is dark only on the side he turns towards himself, throwing a broad red glare on all the world beside, and showing forth the sins of the poor scared multitude in such bold relief, that the purity of his light, and the immensity of their magnitude, become equally conspicuous.”

Charles felt himself very painfully mystified. He was as perfectly unacquainted with the periodical press, as if no such mighty engine had ever been constructed; and after blushing to the ears, and pinching his hat for a few agonising moments, he at length replied,

“I am afraid, sir, that I do not perfectly understand you. I fear that I am not so quick as I would wish to be in seizing upon a metaphor.”

“I am afraid so, too, my dear fellow,” replied Mr. Marchmont, with smiling benignity. “But be not alarmed; this ignorance, this slowness, however extraordinary at this advanced period of the world’s existence, is not fatal—at least, if you lend yourself with readiness and sincerity to acquire the information I am ready to bestow, it need not be fatal to your hopes. However, if indeed the omnipotent, the everlasting WE, be unknown to you, it will be impossible as yet to try your strength in criticism. A very essential portion of *The Regenerator* is devoted to the passing sentence on the literary productions of the day. On this, as being by far the easiest part of our business, I would have tried your young wing, had you been acquainted, even in a slight degree, with the instrument with which the work is done; but as you are not, I cannot grant you this indulgence at present. However, if we go on well together, Chesterfield, you shall have your fair share of it hereafter; though, to say truth, I dearly love the work myself. That cut-and-thrust manœuvring from behind a golden screen, lined with a mirror that reflects to our own pleased eyes each daring stroke we give, and sure the while to be cheered by the plaudits of the laughing crowd, is, I confess, the sort of exercise I most delight in. Nevertheless, I let my faithful helpers share it with me occasionally. But towards you this indulgence must be delayed.”

“I am ready, sir,” said Charles, with a sort of *naïf* self-confidence, “to attempt whatever you will trust to me.”

“Suppose, then, my dear fellow, that, by way of a *coup d'essai*, you try your hand on a series of papers on ‘*The Philosophy of Suicide?*’” returned Marchmont, after rapidly running his eye over a long list of *ad captandum* titles, of which he had always a large and varied assortment on hand. “It is a splendid subject, my dear young friend, and has the rare advantage of novelty.”

“Certainly,” said Charles, colouring, with eagerness, “it is a subject that affords scope for much eloquence of declamation, and might give occasion,” he added thoughtfully, “to many Rembrandt-coloured portrayings of the darker recesses of the human heart. The clear obscure of such meditations must perforce be interesting.”

“Good!—very good phrase that. Take a note of it, Chesterfield,” said Mr. Marchmont, pushing a pencil towards his young friend. “But, instead of *heart*, say *intelligence*. It is more profound.”

“But I was going on to say, sir,” resumed Charles, encouraged by his patron’s commendation, “that I feared I should find little new to say on the philosophical views which may be taken of that most unphilosophical act—though of the morbid feelings which lead to it there may be much.”

“D—n it, man! of course there won’t be much if you take the same side of the question as all the old fogies who twaddled in the twilight of their intellects (good alliteration that, ‘twaddled in the twilight,’” muttered Mr. Marchmont, parenthetically, as he made a mem. of it), “before the regeneration of the human mind. That won’t do. Keep the antithesis though—jot down *unphilosophical* views which have been taken of that most philosophical act—d’ye see? Never lose any thing, Chesterfield, never let go a *jeu de mots*, or a pun, or a proverb, or any thing else, when you once get hold of it. That is the way we get up what is called the sparkling style. How else d’ye think we could make some of our papers run on, like a *feu de joie*, as they do? You must pay particular attention to this, Mr. Chesterfield; and if any thing bright, like a pun, or a joke of any kind, comes into your head when you are in company, always stop short—never speak it—it is just throwing away so much capital. When once you are known to write in the “*Regenerator*,” that will be quite sufficient to establish your reputation as a man of talent. You need not trouble yourself to say clever things. We never do, we make a point of it. You may make people stare a little, now and then, by saying something startling and wild. That

answers occasionally very well. But come! suppose you just give me an idea of the way in which you would treat the subject we were talking of. How would you start off upon it?"

To say the truth, Charles had been a good deal puzzled by his patron's hints about fogies and twaddling—but he was quite ready to suppose that it was his own fault, and that he had not clearly followed the line of his argument. He had not the slightest doubt, however, that these fogies who twaddled in twilight before the regeneration of the human mind, were the heathen philosophers, whose doctrines in favour of self-murder he was now called upon to combat; and with this conviction he set about obeying the behest he had received.

"I would first, sir," he said, "take a rapid view of the probable design with which man was created, and of the destinies, for the fulfilment of which he comes into the world. I would then——"

"Good!" interrupted Mr. Marchmont. "'Fulfilment of destiny'—'come into the world.' Very good phrases those. Only it would be as well to get rid of the words 'created' and 'design;' they are objectionable on many accounts. As a general rule, Mr. Chesterfield, to be observed in all philosophical writing, remember to avoid all words and phrases which tend to give a precise and clearly-defined idea to the mind. Notions so formed must of necessity be narrow and *bornés*. Besides, you may trust my assurance, founded on very ample experience, that the detestable harshness of a rigidly-marked outline is as prejudicial in philosophy as it is unpicturesque in nature. You will find this last sentence in my "Bacon Blasted, or the New Novum Organon;"—a work, by the by, which it may be well worth your while to look into before you commence your career as a philosophical writer. I rather flatter myself you will find it worth some slight attention."

Charles felt as if a film were falling from his eyes. "Bacon Blasted!" he murmured unconsciously—"Bacon Blasted?"

"Yes, Chesterfield, "Bacon Blasted, or the *New Novum Organon*," returned Marchmont, laughing. "Does it frighten you?"

"Frighten? Oh! no, sir. Disquisition should never frighten a man. But the first perception of these newly-opening truths is very grand—is almost awful!"

"Capital! Mr. Chesterfield. That sort of style will make a hit, I promise you. On with you! Let us have more of it!"

"I am thinking, sir," replied Charles, between a sigh and a smile, "I am thinking how much I shall have to unlearn before I shall be in a state even to begin my studies under you."

"Likely enough, *mon cher*. Unlearn away then as fast as you

can—and the sooner you succeed in throwing to the winds the rotten mass of old-world prejudices which hang about you, the sooner will you be able to take your place in the van of advancing intellect, beside the mighty master-spirits with whom it will be in my power to bring you face to face. This is the object of your ambition, is it not? This is what you aim at.”

“Yes, yes—O yes!” replied Charles, starting almost in terror lest his purpose or his courage should be doubted. “This hope is my dream by night, my ceaseless thought by day. But I see, I see, that I have been hugging darkness while in search of light. And, alas! when this is the case, how great is the darkness!”

“Egad, my boy, you are first-rate!” exclaimed Mr. Marchmont, joyously. “That tirade is a jewel, and I will set it myself, I’ll be hanged if I don’t. You know the old saying about the devil’s quotations. But upon my word, young man, I like you vastly.”

This praise, though he hardly knew for what or wherefore it was bestowed upon him, came in good time to combat the humiliating perception of all the deficiencies of his rustic education, which had so suddenly become visible to himself. The very title of Mr. Marchmont’s work had caused a sort of mental convulsion within him, that would have almost shaken his reason, had not his will at once dragged down his intellect, and brought it prisoner to the footstool of the great man who stood before him, surrounded to his eyes by all the splendour of metropolitan renown. There was no struggle, therefore, or it was so slight as hardly to deserve the name, ere his prostrate mind submitted itself to this tyrannical authority; and, instead of continuing the sketch of his intended article, he said, with touching modesty,

“Perhaps, sir, as this will be my first introduction to the pages of the ‘Regenerator,’ it would be better if you were to give me some idea of the line of reasoning which your own elevated principles and deep knowledge of the human heart would suggest to you on the subject you have named.”

“Better, my lad? Why yes, I suppose there is no great doubt that it would be better; but that’s a sort of bore that I should never think of submitting to. However, as you really do seem to have something in you, I will for once and away give you a few notes. But it is only for once and away; remember, you must not ask me again. It is a sort of slavery that I could not submit to twice.”

“I cannot thank you enough for your kindness, sir,” replied Charles, “and I trust I shall never be so ungrateful as to abuse it. But at the first outset I certainly do want your help.”

“That’s all right, and natural enough. Now then you must wait upon me.” And as he said this Mr. Marchmont settled him-

self in his arm chair, stretched out his legs, and assumed the air of a person determined to be very particularly at his ease.

"Believe me, I would not change the office to become chamberlain to the king!" exclaimed Charles, with enthusiasm; and, suddenly rising he placed himself before his patron as if waiting for orders, and eager to obey them.

"You are the right stuff, Chesterfield, I see that—and you'll become a prime favourite, if you will but go on as you have begun. First bring me over that blotting-book, and the scrap of paper that lies beside it. Now the ink. Can you mend a pen, Chesterfield?"

"Yes."

"That's well—mend me two. Now then, I have got the whole train of argument as clear as the lustrous eyes of Emmeline. But I shall make nothing of it, my dear fellow, without my golden spurs. You shall have the honour of putting them on for me."

Charles looked at him as if ready to fly at his bidding the moment it should become intelligible, but as yet most profoundly ignorant as to what it might be.

Marchmont laughed. "You do not understand that figure of speech, my new friend? Never mind, you shall soon be initiated. You have heard of Pegasus, I suppose, have you not?"

"The winged horse that bears you in your hours of inspiration high, high aloft, far above human ken," replied Charles, kindling, as he more and more felt the intimacy of the precious intercourse he was enjoying.

"Ay, *mon cher*, that's the cattle I mean. But those who ride want spurs, you know, let the beast be of earth or heaven. Now my spurs, you must know, my golden spurs, are lodged behind those volumes of Jefferson. Go about it gently; there, that's it, first the tumbler and teaspoon, then the brandy-bottle. The sugar stands on that table yonder, and as for the hot water, I dare say you'll find enough in that little tin cup on the hob. Now, Chesterfield! do you think you have wit enough to mix a tumbler worthy of the Regenerator?"

"I will try, sir," said the young man, setting about the task assigned him, and determined to bring to bear upon it all the experience he had, which, to say truth, was very little.

"*Halte-là!*" bellowed his friend, as he saw him draining the limpid contents of the tin cup into the tumbler. "God help you, my boy, is that your notion of the golden spur? Back with that dolorously copious portion of Adam's ale, my good friend. That's too much still, just leave half of it, Chesterfield—that will do. Now fill it to the brim with the water of life! You look surprised. Alas! my friend! an intellect so overworked as mine

has need of this. Byron, as of course you know, was incapable of writing a single line before he had roused his spirit by a cup like this—only, instead of using water at all, it is said he made a mixture in equal portions of laudanum and blood, and with that alone tempered the potent draught.”

“Gracious Heaven! Is that possible?” demanded Charles, with a shudder. “Surely you are but jesting!” and Charles smiled, but grimly.

“Possible? jesting? It is as certainly true as that you stand there—nay, more, when he felt the god-like madness stir within him, I have been told, nor do I doubt the fact, that he was wont to pour the inspiring potion into a human skull, and thence to quaff it! Is there not something grand, magnificent, intense in this? Do you not feel the very pulse of poesy throb in your temples as you hear of it. I am sure I do,” added the Regenerator, swallowing the last mouthful of the potent dose. “I feel it in every vein, in every fibre; and the world shall know that I do, Chesterfield, when I can find leisure to begin my immortal poem. The title of that poem is fixed—fixed as fate, young man; no earthly motive shall ever induce me to change it. But think not to know it yet. I love you well, upon my soul I do; but we must be bound together by long, strong, tried affection, ere the deep sublime of these dread words shall pass into your soul from my confiding lips. Not yet!—not yet!” and the Regenerator moved his hand mysteriously.

Charles trembled with emotion. Was he indeed so near, so very near the charmed circle which contained within itself the well-head of immortality? Was it indeed thus that Byron wrought? Was it thus that Marchmont had attained the glorious elevation on which he stood? If so, might he not hope, might he not try himself? The Welsh giant, so gloriously immortalized in “Jack the Giant Killer,” conceived a thought extremely like to this, at the most critical moment of his destiny. But Chesterfield did not remember this; it might perhaps have been useful to him if he had.

“Come, you young what’s-your-name,” resumed the Pindar in *esse*, “it is no good for you to stand there, looking like a duck in thunder. Come and place yourself behind me, and read the words as I write them. You will see how it is done, at any rate, though I won’t quite promise you should do the like. Now for it! I am in the vein! I feel the burning thoughts—the scorching words!”

Mr. Marchmont, as he uttered the last sentence, seized the pen, and began writing, sometimes very rapidly for lines together, sometimes slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, as if look-

ing there for the words he sought ; while Charles the while stood fixed behind him, greedily swallowing the characters as they became visible.

“THOUGHTS ON SUICIDE.

“Let us thank the gods that there is on this momentous subject one simple fact which never has been doubted—namely, that as man is not consulted respecting his entrance into the world, he has clearly and indefeasibly the right to quit it at his pleasure. A prisoner of war is considered at liberty to effect his escape whenever an opportunity may offer, provided he has not given his parole to remain in durance. And when did man, either directly or indirectly, give his parole to remain in this fleshy prison-house?”

“Do you see, Chesterfield? You read as I go on, don’t you?” said the animated penman, suddenly turning himself round in his chair, and fixing his glaring eyes on Charles.

“I do not lose a word, sir,” replied the young man.

“Observe, then,” resumed the Regenerator. “Here is a point on which you must dilate; a multitude of magnificent illustrations must, of course, occur to you here. I have sown the seed, my good fellow, and if dulness does not stifle it, a copious harvest must follow.” Mr. Marchmont then knocked his spoon sharply upon the edge of his glass, and resumed his pen.

“The soul, by its own nature, demonstrates its right to freedom from earthly bonds. Are we able to bind it for an instant?”

“I am in great force at this moment,” he muttered, and, again striking his glass, went on writing.

“Are we able to bind the subtle essence for an instant? What is that elevated and delicious state of intellectual emancipation called by the vile vulgar wool-gathering? What but the unmistakable declaration of the soul, that it must and will be free?”

“But, Chesterfield, what are you about all this time? Twice I have begged, implored, besought you to replenish this silly-looking empty glass. What can be your notion of intellectual labour? Why even the mighty steam-engine itself wants oil. How then can a weak machine like man get on unaided?”

Stammering a hasty apology about not having understood his signal, and being altogether occupied by following the movements of his pen, Charles rapidly replenished the tumbler, and then replaced himself behind Marchmont’s chair, who, having nearly drained it at a single draught, resumed his pen, and with renovated inspiration resumed his scrawl.

“Shall, then, the unjustifiable clog of a forced incarnation inflict the miseries of matter upon the immaterial spark, nor leave he left to shake it off at will?”

“Bring me one of those cigars, will you?—those lying there on the chimney-piece. Great Jove! how magnificent is this flow of thought! Mark me, Chesterfield, at this moment; the divine essence is at work within me! Like the immortal oracles of old, I feel the sacred voice within, and give it utterance, almost without volition.

"Never, no never, can that ethereal spark part, or, as it were, crackle and sparkle in eagerness to wing its rapid way 'midst kindred essences, along the bright interminable regions of the starry vault, without giving proof as strong as nature's self can offer, that suicide is the most glorious act the hand of man can achieve. What is the blood which follows such a stroke, but a libation to the power of mind? Yet, despite the strictest deductions of argumentative ratiocination, proving the absurdity of man's remaining here one instant after it seems good to his intelligence that he should leave the life he loathes, the wretched bigots who still hold rule among us would bury him in a crossing of four roads, and drive a stake through his body to punish it for having let loose its tenant soul! Idiots! the day may come, perhaps, and at no distant date, when the cross-road and the stake shall be the doom of those who cowardly have lived to the last gasp of their allotted span, nor dared to choose the moment for themselves."

"But this won't do," exclaimed Mr. Marchmont, suddenly interrupting himself, and wiping his forehead. "I find, my dear sir, that this subject inspires me to such a degree, that it would be culpable, as editor of *The Regenerator*, were I to give it into other hands. I have written one or two sentences here that—in short, that I cannot part with. I speak as a matter of duty, nothing else, I assure you—I really must go on with this subject myself, and shall make a leader of it. Leave me, Mr. Chesterfield, I have occasional headaches, which often follow these remarkable flashes of inspiration, and I wish to put the present moment to profit, before either the headach, or its sleepy remedy, fall upon me."

"I will go this moment, sir," replied Charles, a little frightened, and a good deal disappointed by this sudden dismissal. "But let me know first, if it still be your wish that I should write for *The Regenerator*."

"Confound it! you are not touchy, I hope? My wish?—To be sure it is; and if I don't persevere in writing a skeleton sketch for you it is only because I think you are able to do without it. You are very clever, Chesterfield, there is no question about it—the sort of effect I produce upon you decidedly shows it. No slow heavy earthworm of a pedant ever kindled as you do—you are perfectly capable of working by yourself."

"Then, so encouraged, may I ask you, sir, if there would be any objection to my selecting for my theme the immortality of the soul? The splendid theory upon man's right of will, which you have just produced, leads, as it seems to me, directly to the subject; and perhaps my article might have the honour of following yours? The mere idea that it might do so inspires me."

"Stop a moment! for heaven's sake, don't run away with any ridiculous *non sequiturs*. I should never forgive myself if I led you into any such absurdity. If you fall to work on that rather musty subject at all, you must take devilish good care that you do

it with a spirit perfectly philosophical. It would be ruin to *The Regenerator*, perfect ruin, sir, if that theme were to be treated in a twaddling manner in its pages. For the most part, our system is to avoid every thing approaching to what are ordinarily classed as religious subjects. This restraint, however, will probably not be necessary much longer; and, as soon as it can be safely thrown off, it is my purpose to embody, in a series of essays, all the arguments against Christianity brought forward by Mr. Robert Owen at Cincinnati, in the year 1828, during his famous controversy with the Reverend Mr. Campbell, in which he undertook to prove to the world the fallacy of the whole thing. The present is a noble opportunity for declamation on this promising subject, and it is by no means my intention to lose it."

So strongly, as yet, did Chesterfield's religious education cling to him, that though exceedingly vexed at finding how difficult it was for him to follow the rapid transitions of such a mind as Mr. Marchmont's, he doubted not but that in some way or other THE TRUTH would be brought forth from all the difficult processes to which he perceived it was that gentleman's method to submit it, like gold from the crucible. But, nevertheless, he felt that he was himself, for the present at least, quite unequal to perform any of the intermediate operations by which this desirable result was to be obtained; and therefore taking his hat from under the table, and making a most respectful bow, he said,

"Perhaps, sir, just at first it may be safer for me to confine myself to some short work of imagination. Will you give me leave to wait upon you in a day or two with something of this kind, both in verse and prose?"

"Yes, yes, you are very right. If I find you possess facility of composition, I can let you mount afterwards. Good bye, good bye. Off with you, I am getting devilish sleepy, already."

Charles Chesterfield then repeated his bow and departed; and, as he shut the door, the head of the inspired philosopher sank on his breast, his eyes closed, and a heavy sleep nestling round him, like cotton on a burn, once more stilled the throbbing pulses of his glowing soul.

CHAPTER XI.

Sir George Meddows's constant Appetite for "Change"—A Peep behind the Curtain—Family Secrets—A "Monster hated by Gods and Men."

THE day which Mrs. Longuéville and Clara had fixed for their first evening party was rather an unfortunate one for any thing of the kind; for the morning of it produced one or two events by no means agreeable. During the breakfast, indeed, the family trio, with the addition of Charles, were rather more gay than

usual, for Sir George was in high good-humour; Mrs. Longuéville had succeeded in coaxing Clara out of a pair of gold bracelets, which for some weeks she had been endeavouring to seduce from her niece's trinket-box to her own; Clara herself was rather less grave than ordinary; and Charles had that morning run off a dozen verses in praise of Love, which he could not help thinking were not altogether unworthy of *The Regenerator*.

"Why, Charles, you are positively growing dandyish," said Sir George, looking at the young man's handsome hair, which had certainly been rather carefully arranged, notwithstanding his poetic occupation. "I'll be hanged if he has not learned the wave destructive already!"

The youthful novice blushed and smiled, while Mrs. Longuéville, remembering her lesson, condescended to say,

"Mr. Chesterfield has such remarkably fine hair, that it really deserves a little attention."

"What are you going to do with yourself this evening, my dear fellow?" said the condescending baronet.

Charles, once more a little surprised, was however preparing to answer that he should be engaged at his lodgings, when Clara stopped him, by saying,

"I consider Mr. Chesterfield engaged to me for this evening. Some of the Gibson family will be here whom he will like to meet, and I have also invited the celebrated Mrs. Sherbourne; she is going every where at present, and is quite the fashion. Mr. Chesterfield will, of course, like to make her acquaintance. Her play is to come out in a week or two, and then it will of course be a vice not to know her."

"Right, right, Clara, I am really obliged to you for thinking of it; that is all very considerate and kind. I was not aware of your literary department being in such force to-night; you must pass your evening with us, then, my dear Charles—no excuses—I shall not part with you to-night, say what you will. Your interest is as dear to me as that of my own family—which I need not tell you, however, for by this time you must know so much of me at any rate. What a plague there is to get change. Can any of you lend me six or seven shillings before I go out? If I send out for it, I shall be too late for my appointment."

Mrs. Longuéville declared that she had not a sixpence in the world. Clara sighed, not very audibly, but said nothing; till Charles, taking out a little purse that Bessy had constructed for him, drew thence three or four shillings and half-a-sovereign. She then said with considerable vivacity,

"Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Chesterfield; I dare say I shall be able to find as much silver as my father requires for the moment,"

and she too drew out her purse and laid a few shillings upon the table.

“Why you are both overflowing with the

‘Pale and common drudge ’tween man and man,’

as Shakspeare very uncivilly calls that extremely convenient article, silver money; while I, alas the while! possess not the accommodation of a silver groat. Hold there, Charles! positively you shall neither of you put up your purses till I have taken toll: you have no idea how I was bothered yesterday by the want of change.” And, suiting the action to the word, the lively baronet stretched out a hand to each. Charles immediately deposited his stock of shillings in the one presented to him, and was closing the clasp of his small treasury, when Sir George laying his hand upon it, and gaily laughing, said, “Nay, you shall lend me that little yellow one, too—I’ll pay you this evening, my dear fellow, *sans faute*. By the by, Charles, I must have you taught French,” he added, carelessly dropping the contents of each hand into his two waistcoat-pockets.

Clara’s face was seen by no one, for at the same moment that she placed the money in her father’s hand, she pushed back her chair, and, suddenly rising, walked out of the room, with a step so hasty as to be almost unsteady.

She remained absent but a few minutes, however, which were employed by Sir George in proving to his *protégé* that the acquirement of the French language was indispensable for him; but when she returned, Charles raised his eyes to her face, and fancied that he perceived the traces of tears on the fairest cheeks in the world. He was shocked and he was puzzled, became perfectly unable to follow the thread of his patron’s animated discourse, and would have given a joint of his little finger to know what it was that caused her unhappiness, or at any rate her very obvious agitation.

Sir George Meddows had in some degree acquired the habit of not looking in his daughter’s face, and therefore it is possible that the appearance which so strongly moved Charles was not perceived by him. Be this as it may, however, the conversation languished, and the breakfast speedily came to a conclusion. Charles, as usual, retreated to his lodgings, the ladies to their separate morning rooms, and Sir George to his library, where he amused himself for an hour or two, notwithstanding his pressing appointment.

Before we follow him thither we will give a sketch, a very short sketch, of the position of his daughter. Of her character and of her feelings no explanation is necessary beyond what events will bring forth; but these will be better understood if the circum-

stances in which she stood be clearly stated. From Sir George's having no son, it followed, as a matter of course in public opinion, that his only daughter must be an heiress, and so she certainly would have been had her father possessed any thing to bequeath. But beyond his life-interest in a dilapidated and very encumbered estate, Sir George Meddows possessed only a few thousands less than nothing. He had never hinted at this fact to his daughter; but there was, unfortunately perhaps for her peace, a sort of habitual logic in the mind of poor Clara, which led her involuntarily to infer this truth, as well as many others, from circumstances that passed before her eyes, but in which she bore no other part than that of a silent, sentient, and most unhappy spectator. Without ever having heard the subject alluded to, she was quite sure that her father was not only poor, but in debt. By the same silent process she had also come to the conviction that it was very much against his inclination that either circumstances should be known in his family, or out of it; nay, more, that frequent efforts were made on his part to confirm the idea that she was heiress to a large fortune. She knew, too, or rather, perhaps, she did very strongly suspect, that his embarrassments were sometimes of a kind which rendered "the very smallest trifles acceptable," and the sufferings produced by this suspicion, and by one still worse which followed it, respecting the nature of the means sometimes taken to obtain such trifles, were sufficient to poison her existence, blight her youth, and sometimes almost to change her nature from the shrinking delicacy of feminine gentleness to a sternness of feeling very greatly its reverse. Nevertheless, Clara was—but there is no use in thus forestalling.

It was certainly, on the whole, a great blessing to her that a cousin of her mother's had left her five thousand pounds sterling, vested in the English funds, of which she came into possession on her twenty-first birthday. This was certainly a blessing, inasmuch as it spared her the petty but vile annoyance of asking supply for her personal wants. Yet, though conscious of the relief thus brought, and thankful for it, there were moments when the having to battle against her pitiful father's cupidity, by resisting his incessant borrowings, caused her more suffering, she thought, than any mere want of money could have brought with it. Before she had been of age three months, Sir George gave her to understand that, as his first object in life was to see her take her proper station in the world, he was compelled to tax her little income to contribute to the expense which he deemed it necessary to incur on her account. To this she had most willingly acceded; and, reserving fifty pounds a-year for her own

expenses, regularly paid over to him the remainder as soon as it reached her hands. The little heartachs revealed by this hasty sketch are not either of the sublime or the pathetic kind ; but, as *Mercutio* says of his scratch, though not so deep as a well nor so wide as a church-door, yet 't was enough ; and a 'grave' girl was Clara, despite her youth and loveliness, and a multitude of other very precious gifts besides.

Before Sir George Meddows had well seated himself in his library, after quitting the breakfast-table, and while his betting-book was still unopened in his hand, a servant entered and announced "Mr. Cromwell."

"What the devil did you let him—" but before the "*in for*" could be spoken, the long-nosed, thin-lipped, brown-bobbed individual named was already in the room, and the betting-book being quickly smothered under a mass of newspapers, Sir George stepped gracefully forward, with an extended hand.

"'Morning, Sir George," said the visitor, apparently not perceiving the offered hand, and employing his own dexter limb in exploring the depths of his coat-pocket, while its fellow held his broad hat and gold-tipped cane.

"I am particularly glad to see you, Cromwell," said the baronet, seating himself with the air of one preparing for a comfortable cose ; "you are exactly the man I wanted to see."

"That's lucky, sir. But, if you please, we will attend to my business first ; and then, if you have any thing new to say to me you may say it," replied Mr. Cromwell, seating himself at the table, and depositing thereon a very large pocket-book.

"So be it, Cromwell, so be it," returned Sir George, with the most perfect good humour. "Now then, what is your business?"

Mr. Cromwell drew up his mouth with a grave sort of smile, and said, "well now, Sir George Meddows, I should have thought you might have been able to guess. However, I have not the least objection to tell you. I am come for the sum of seven hundred and eighty-five pounds, the payment of which, in one manner or another, you have promised about seven hundred and eighty-five times within the last two years. I don't mean to wait any longer, Sir George. You will be pleased to give me a draft for the sum directly. I have need of the money, and must have it forthwith, without palaver, procrastination, or delay."

"Egad, Cromwell, it is a curious coincidence that I wanted to talk to you exactly on the same subject. That money has been owing too long, Cromwell. It vexes me. I can't endure any thing of the sort. There is not a more systematic man living, in accounts, than I am. Ask round about my place in the country, and you will hear what sort of a character I have in that respect.

But to be sure there never was such a devilish string of unlucky accidents as have happened to me about this paltry sum, which, after all, I borrowed for the convenience of a friend, and in no way whatever for my own. I never had a sixpence of it."

"That was very gracious and kind of you, Sir George, but it don't make the least bit of difference to me. I hope it did him good, whoever he was; but, if it was the ruin of him, I must have it again, just the same. And, I'm sorry to say, I am rather in a particular hurry. I have got your promissory-note here, in my pocket-book, and I dare say you have got your cheque-book there in that desk, so the business may be settled at once."

"To be sure it may, Cromwell; what is there to delay it?" replied the smiling debtor, drawing the desk towards him; and then, while seeking in more pockets than one for the key of it, he added, "but what I want to consult you upon will rather help than hinder us. Observe, Cromwell, the fact is that notwithstanding all my care and caution, and I will defy any man to point out a person more scrupulously regular in his accounts than I am; yet, notwithstanding this, my careless steward in Ireland has managed matters so badly that I declare to you, strange as it must seem to any body who knows my manner of doing business, he has contrived to leave the estate completely out at elbows. I say *leave*, because, of course, I have sent him off, and at this moment I am actually managing the whole concern myself. This is an undertaking, my dear Mr. Cromwell, vastly more troublesome to me than it would be to most people, from my systematic habits of regularity in all money matters. Most others would, I dare say, let things go on till the estate had cleared itself, which it would do with only tolerable management in three years, for it is a noble property, a very noble property, but I can't endure the sort of thing. To feel that I have an encumbered estate for three months would render me perfectly miserable, and before the end of the three years I believe I should hang myself. I cannot endure any thing of the kind."

Mr. Cromwell here drew out his watch, and having cast his eyes upon it said, rising as he spoke, "I beg your pardon, Sir George, but I really am in haste, very great haste; give me the cheque, if you please, and some other day I will call, if you wish it, and hear all you may wish to say about your estate in Ireland. But just at this moment I must take leave to observe, that your business is of less importance to me than my own. It's unpolite to say it, I suppose, but so it is."

"Of course it is, Mr. Cromwell. A man of my business-like habits is hardly likely to blunder on that point. But give me leave to say, you are rather over hasty, my good friend. Every

word I have said, or am about to say, concerns your affairs fully as much as my own. In a word, sir, my intention is to make a great sacrifice of immediate income for the purpose of at once clearing the property. I am ready to offer nine per cent., Mr. Cromwell, for a loan of five thousand pounds; and the moment I made up my mind to do this, I determined, as a return for the obliging readiness with which you lent me the trifle for which you now apply, to offer this very advantageous little mortgage to you. Now, sir, I hope you will be ready to allow that I have not detained you by any unmeaning wordiness, and that what I had to say to you was of some importance."

"Certainly, sir, certainly. I don't think you ever speak without meaning, Sir George, and I should hold him to be a very dull-pated fellow who suspected it. Nine per cent. is very fine interest, Sir George Meddows, and when secured upon a fine property, with no other incumbrance, is not to be refused lightly—most certainly it is great interest."

"I own I think so," interrupted Sir George, rather proudly.

"No question about it, Sir George Meddows, the thing speaks for itself. I will give you an answer to your proposal this day week; and now—as I really am under a great pressure of business——"

"Oh! that will do perfectly, Cromwell," said Sir George, rising and applying his hand to the bell, "never mind about *now* as you are in a hurry. Good morning, I will not detain you a moment longer; and pray be assured that the time of a man of business is, in my eyes, as precious as the gold of Ophir."

"It is, sir, when employed as it ought to be. But the affair which brought me here seems to have escaped your memory. I must have your cheque, Sir George, before I leave the room, for seven hundred and eighty-five pounds, for which I have your bill in my pocket-book. You cannot, with your very regular habits of business, have forgotten how often I have applied for it, how often payment has been promised, and how often I have been disappointed. I do not intend to be disappointed again."

"I have memoranda, sir, with dates affixed, of every transaction connected with the business," replied Sir George solemnly; "but you must think I am jesting with you, Mr. Cromwell, if you suppose that my proposition was to pay you with one hand and to borrow from you with the other. Of all men in the world, you and I are the last who should waste our moments in bandying such idle words as these. The interest charged by you on your former loan was five per cent.; of course, as a gentleman and a man of honour, it is my intention to include this sum of seven hundred and eighty-five pounds in the mortgage-money for which

we are now negotiating, at nine per cent. This, sir, must, I think, fully satisfy you."

"I have promised to enter with you on this mortgage business, Sir George, this day week," replied Cromwell, "but your present debt to me must be settled immediately. Your next memorandum on the subject must be that you have paid me this debt—or—that an execution was sent into your house for the recovery of it."

"You are using very strange language!" said Sir George, changing colour very perceptibly. "Of course," he resumed, "I have no suspicion of your putting your savage menace into execution; but the unnecessarily alluding to such measures can scarcely be considered as consistent with the manners of a gentleman."

"Very likely, Sir George Meddows. I never affected to be a gentleman, I have no right to the title. I am a money-lender. Is it your intention, sir, to pay me immediately? if not, it is mine to send a writ of execution into your house before night."

The manner of Sir George suddenly changed. He ceased either to cajole or to bluster. "Had I been aware," he said, "that you were really in want of this money, Mr. Cromwell, I should have paid you long ago. But the reports which have reached me of your being a wealthy man led me to consider the precise time of repayment as a matter of as little importance to you as it certainly is to me. Give me leave to run my eye over my banking-book. I received it but yesterday with the balance made out, or with my regularity I should hardly be at a loss to tell you at once whether I have funds there equal to your demand, without encroaching upon the thousand pounds which I always choose should remain with them; and you must pardon me if I say, Mr. Cromwell, that not even your blustering threat will induce me to break a rule so long held sacred by me upon monetary principles of aristocratic delicacy, as essential to my station, in my opinion, as the crest upon my coat of arms."

While he said this, Sir George employed himself in unlocking a drawer of his library table, and taking thence the vellum-covered repository of his most secret knowledge, and Mr. Cromwell very composedly took snuff.

"No, sir," resumed Sir George, after glancing his eye upon the mystic page, and returning the book to its place, "I cannot give you a cheque to the amount you demand."

"Then I wish you good morning, sir," said the money-lender, rising, and rather unceremoniously putting on his expansive hat."

"Stay, sir!" said Sir George, intercepting his progress towards

the door. "Let me understand you clearly. Is it seriously your purpose to send an execution into my house?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Cromwell.

"To-day?"

"Within half an hour, sir. The proper persons are already aware of what they have to do on my quitting the house, provided I do not countermand the orders I have given."

"Then assuredly, Mr. Cromwell, I shall not permit you to quit my house without being paid. To you, I dare say, the inconveniences of such a mode of dunning for payment are not so apparent as to persons in a different station: and, therefore, I shall hold myself bound to excuse you. Remain where you are, if you please. Or—no—rather permit me to escort you into the waiting-room on the other side of the hall. You will remain, sir, while I write to a friend to assist me in making the payment thus rudely called for; and, during the interval, you may meditate on the wisdom of your conduct."

Mr. Cromwell took off his hat again, and permitted his dignified host to lead him to the receptacle of great-coats and umbrellas which he had mentioned, amidst which he seated himself with very philosophic composure.

Returned to the library, Sir George Meddows sat down to his writing-desk in no very pleasant frame of mind. The business itself was sufficiently disagreeable, and was rendered more so by his uncertainty as to how he should set about it. There were already so very many of his dear friends to whom he owed as much money as he could conveniently contrive to get out of them, that he did not even trouble himself to run the names of any such over in his memory. No, there were but three persons who stood before his mind's eye for selection. The first of these was his sister, Mrs. Longuéville; but she was dismissed as soon as looked at. True, all she had was in the English funds, and the sum he required might have been made over to him with most satisfactory facility. But he knew her too well to hope that his specious eloquence, used at its very highest pressure, would extract a shilling from her without security as good as that which she held already. The next person in the trio was his daughter. The readiness of the transfer would in this case be the same; and, moreover, he felt as sure that his request would be granted by Clara, as he was that it would be refused by her aunt. Nevertheless, there were objections, and mighty ones, to his making this demand upon her little fortune. That which naturally presented itself to him first was, the fact that he should inevitably, and without any power whatever of procrastination or shuffling, be obliged half-yearly to pay the interest

with exactly the same regularity as the Bank of England paid theirs; or, in other words, the dividends which he now received upon it he should receive no longer. This consideration was strong against the deed. But there was something stronger still, though even to himself he would not have acknowledged it, which settled the matter almost before he was aware of it. This unacknowledged something was the look of Clara's eye, such as he had already seen it when it had fixed itself quietly upon him after any of the thousand and one tricks by which he sustained his tottering position had chanced to reach her knowledge. It was rather, therefore, a sensation than an argument which made him rapidly turn his thoughts from this measure, and seize upon his pen, to address himself without further delay to the third party whom this exigency had brought to his mind as one capable of assisting him. Having once decided, the letter did not take long to write, and ran thus :

“MY DEAR DALRYMPLE,—For God's sake come to me directly. A most vexatious and wholly unexpected circumstance has occurred, which requires the aid of a friend; but I could not endure to ask this aid of any one with whom I was in less close and intimate relationship than yourself. Fail me not, therefore, but let me see you with as little delay as possible,

“Faithfully yours,

“GEORGE MEDDOWS.”

CHAPTER XII.

“Hopes and Fears and jealous Cares”—Sir George manifests a fine Talent for romantic Fiction—A *Contre-temps*.

WHEN the letter of Sir George Meddows was delivered to Mr. Dalrymple, it found him, as studious gentlemen are often found, with abundance of books around him, but with his thoughts wandering to scenes wherein their wisdom was not likely to do him much service. Dalrymple, as usual, had lounged for an hour in the drawing-room of “his guardian” the preceding evening, and had again found Miss Meddows and Charles Chesterfield as effectually *tête-à-tête* for all purposes of conversation as if the *écarté* table of the baronet and his sister had been in the dining-room. Clara was dressed for a late evening party to which she was going with her aunt, and it struck him that he had never seen her look so surpassingly beautiful before. It struck him also that there was a richer blush on her cheek, and a liquid lustre of greater softness in her eyes than usual. Was it that she could not sit apart, and listen thus alone to the poetic

fancies of the lad so strongly ingrafted into the family, without feeling stronger emotions than men under mere ordinary circumstances could excite? This was the only way which occurred to Mr. Dalrymple of accounting for the species of beautiful excitement which he discovered on the countenance of Miss Meddows. Had he been blessed with greater perspicuity of perception, it is possible that other reasons might have suggested themselves for the "altered mien" of the young lady at the moment his name was announced.

It is hardly fair, perhaps, to spy into the secrets of one so very averse to betraying them herself; but in sad and sober truth Clara had put on her ornaments, and smoothed her raven locks, and approved the effect of her soft muslin robe, with its bordering of gold, under the very disagreeable conviction that the only eyes whose glance she cared for would not meet hers that night, for Mr. Dalrymple had proclaimed his having a dinner engagement, which was to be followed by the opera, and Mr. Dalrymple had replied to a question from Sir George concerning Mrs. Pomfret's ball, by stating that he had not the honour of knowing the lady. All this was quite true at the time it was spoken; but at quitting the dinner-table a sort of restlessness came over him which rendered the idea of going to the opera perfectly intolerable, and trusting to the good-nature of the fair ladies he was to join there, for forgiveness of his want of punctuality, he made his escape, and very unexpectedly entered the drawing-room of Miss Meddows.

He was revolving all this in no very happy state of spirits, being almost as much annoyed by the self-conviction of the pain his suspicions had caused him, as by the suspicions themselves. Miss Meddows was, in truth, one of the very last young ladies in the world that he would have wished to fall in love with. First, she was the daughter of a man he particularly disliked (though as yet he knew little or nothing about him beyond what was on the surface); secondly, her aunt was a person who never in the course of her conversation brought forward any thing approaching to an idea, without exhibiting an opinion, or a principle, in direct contradiction to his own; thirdly, Clara Meddows had received much of her education abroad, and thus became in some sort identified in his imagination with all that had poisoned his youth, and rendered every thing purely and wholly English so inexpressibly dear to him; fourthly, and lastly, he had, or thought he had, very good reasons for believing that the heart of the young lady, if indeed a female educated out of England could have a heart, was more likely to bestow itself on any man of his acquaintance than on himself. It is not, therefore, much

to be wondered at if, at the moment when he was becoming, almost for the first time, aware that he was not always master of his actions when she was concerned, he should not feel either very well satisfied with himself, or particularly inclined to be compliant and amiable towards others.

Nevertheless, Mr. Dalrymple had no sooner perused the letter of Sir George Meddows, than he suddenly felt all the fogs and mists which were settling very thickly down upon his nerves vanish and evaporate. He was obliged, absolutely obliged, to go to Bruton-street, and that in the character of the most intimate family friend that could be found.

“He has been quarrelling with some one, and has received or sent a challenge,” thought Dalrymple. “Yet that can hardly be either, for he is any thing rather than a quarrelsome man. But it matters not, I am wanted. It may be that I can be of service to——. Absurd! I am persuading myself to believe I am a fool. Sir George Meddows was the friend of my grandfather, and whether I like him or not, it is my duty to be useful to him if I can.”

It would have taken longer, he thought, to order his cab, and wait for its being ready, than he should take in getting from Piccadilly to Bruton-street on foot, and he therefore started forth with an eagerness and rapidity of step which augured well for the success of Sir George Meddows’s attack upon his purse.

His sharp loud knock, announcing an eager visitor, was audible to the anxious baronet’s expectant ears, before he thought it possible that his summons could be obeyed, and it was with surprise, as well as pleasure, that he saw the young man enter the library unannounced, having passed the servant with too quick a step to be overtaken by the measured movement of a polished London serving-man.

“I am here in consequence of your note, Sir George,” he said, extending his hand with more cordiality than usual; “nothing unpleasant has happened to you, I hope? But at any rate I shall be most happy if I can be useful.”

“Thank you, heartily, my dear fellow,” returned the baronet, with an animated smile. “It is worth while to be plagued a little for the sake of proving the kindness of such a friend as yourself, Arthur. No, thank God! nothing very terrible has happened; and yet, as brother Jonathan says, I am in an unhand-some fix, though a very little help will get me out of it. But sit down, sit down, my dear Arthur. I hope you are not in a red-hot hurry to be gone, for to do the thing correctly I must begin at the beginning, and after we have got through this bore of a business, Clara shall give us some luncheon. You are not in a very great hurry, are you?”

“Not at all, Sir George, only that I am eager to know in what way I can be useful to you.”

“Now then, I will tell you all the facts—but take care that you do not blame my pretty Clara, for I could not bear *that*—though beyond all denying she is the cause of my present embarrassment. A few months ago, I protest I forget the exact time, a poor woman whom Clara had employed in some way or other—she was a dressmaker, I believe—came here in the most bitter distress imaginable. Her husband, who was a house-carpenter, had been arrested at the suit of a timber-merchant, for materials consumed in building a mansion for a distinguished nobleman,—think of that, Dalrymple—think of the infamy of it!—from whom he could not obtain a single farthing in payment. There was a large family—the old story, you know. However, it was only too manifest that utter ruin must fall upon a set of very estimable poor creatures if this man was suffered to go to prison. His creditor agreed to take a bill, if it were respectably endorsed, and with this lamentable history in her mouth, and abundance of tears in her eyes, *voilà ma belle Clara* almost falling at my feet to make me endorse the bill. Of course I ought not to have done it, I am quite aware of that now, and so is she too, poor girl, and miserable enough she is, dear child, to atone for a heavier fault. But see the sequel. The poor carpenter is dead, and the timber-merchant has sent me his attorney this morning with the bill, which has become due, accompanied with the most insulting threats of an instant execution in the house if it be not taken up before four o’clock to-day. Imagine the condition of poor Clara! Can you help me, Arthur? The bill is for—for nine hundred and fifty pounds. Of course I need not tell you that the debt shall not be of long standing.”

“You cannot doubt, Sir George, that I shall have great pleasure in affording you this accommodation,” replied Dalrymple; and after a moment’s consideration, he added, “the readiest mode, I think, will be for you to use a part of the money which you hold as my guardian. Of course I do not mean that I shall look for the repayment of it at the moment of my second majority; I am quite aware that this period is too near to render such an arrangement any accommodation at all. You are welcome to keep this sum exactly as long as you may require it, and my only part in the transaction will consist in my giving you a receipt which shall include it, at our approaching settlement. Pray let the mind of your daughter be set at rest upon this subject directly. My part of the transaction is a matter of not the slightest inconvenience to me.”

Almost from the moment at which Mr. Dalrymple began speak-

ing, Sir George had been troubled by a fit of sneezing, which rendered it necessary that he should bury his face in his pocket-handkerchief, and when he ceased, necessary as it was for the baronet to answer him, he could by no means stop the troublesome attack altogether. He shook his head, however, in a manner which very plainly expressed disapprobation, and at length found breath enough to say, with much energy, and tolerable distinctness,

“No, Arthur, no. Positively I will not do that. You have no notion, my dear fellow, what sort of a transaction it is which you are proposing to me. Draw out the trust-money? No, upon my soul, I will not, though Clara should be left without a bed to lie upon, from my refusing to do it. No, by Heaven, I will not do it!”

“Forgive me, Sir George,” replied the young man, colouring; “you are quite right in saying that I know not the nature of the transaction. Most assuredly I did not, if it be of a kind that could give you the slightest pain or mortification of any kind; but I should have thought that if my signature were added to yours, the business could be done without either difficulty or delay of any kind.”

“Just making the matter ten thousand times worse, Arthur. Your signature being in truth of no use whatever in such a transaction. No, my dear Dalrymple, if that is all you can do, why Clara must be contented to see her trinkets and her trumpery go to the hammer. Dear creature! she will be the first to allow that it is her own fault, and I well know that she will bear it like a heroine.”

“But I shall have no difficulty, none whatever, Sir George, in settling this business in another manner,” exclaimed Dalrymple, hastily. “Permit me to return home for my check-book, and the business can be done at once.”

“Nay, my dear fellow,” returned the gay Sir George, recovered from his fit of sneezing, and, as it seemed, from all other annoyances whatever, “there is no need to give you that trouble; we bank at the same house, Dalrymple, and my check-book may serve you.”

Before he had quite ended these words, a drawer was unlocked, the check torn out and laid before the young man, and a pen ready charged with ink placed between his fingers.”

“In whose name shall I draw it?” demanded Dalrymple.

“In mine, Arthur, if you will. I should not choose the name of this rascally attorney to be mixed with yours.”

“And the amount?”

“Nine hundred and fifty. Thank you! Thank you a thousand

times, Arthur! Poor Clara! what a relief will this be to her! But you must let me communicate it, and do not speak to her on the subject, Dalrymple! She could not—poor thing! I know it would overcome her dreadfully.”

“Sir George,” replied Dalrymple, in very evident agitation, “this transaction cannot be concluded without my exacting one condition from you. I must entreat you to promise me that Miss Meddows shall never be made acquainted with my part in it. Will you promise this? Indeed, indeed, you must not refuse me.”

“It is rather a whimsical request, Arthur, is it not? However, of course, I must obey your will, if such it be,” replied Sir George with a shrug.

“I thank you, sir. I am very greatly obliged to your compliance,” was the reply of Dalrymple.

“Well then, now we will go together, shall we, to the dining-room; the luncheon is always punctual in this house, if nothing else is, and for the very excellent and ever-effective reason, that the servants’ dinner follows it. We shall find the ladies there already, I doubt not.”

“I will pay my compliments to Miss Meddows and the luncheon willingly,” replied the young man, while his heart throbbed as he remembered that if her matchless brow showed traces of trouble and anxiety, he should have the delight of knowing, as he looked at her, that the cause had passed away, and by his means, though she should never be embarrassed by knowing it.

“But the attorney?” said Dalrymple, as they approached the dining-room door; “for goodness sake take care that you are not too late for him, Sir George! Let us be careful that Miss Meddows has no further alarm.”

“Fear nothing on that score. The rascal is in the house. I will only perform the office of usher to you, Arthur, and settle the business with him in a moment.”

“Pray do not stand upon such ceremony. If Miss Meddows has already descended, I may venture to announce myself, may I not?”

“Do so, then, my dear fellow. I will join you in a moment.” And well pleased to be thus released, Sir George Meddows returned with a light heart, and a rapid step to his library, to settle what was still to be done, before the detestable Mr. Cromwell could be dismissed.

Had not the irresistible temptation assailed him of getting into his pocket, in the dear shape of ready money, the difference between seven hundred and eighty-five pounds and nine hundred and fifty, the remainder of the business would have been

very easily despatched. As it was, he was obliged to submit to the trouble both of transmitting Dalrymple's check to the bankers, and drawing another himself for his sturdy creditor. But he submitted to it with the utmost good humour, and having crossed his ward's check and sent it off, he despatched a servant to the retreat of Mr. Cromwell with orders to show him again into the library, where he was reseated in great state to receive him.

Mr. Cromwell was, in his way, as bright a genius as Sir George Meddows, and no sooner did he cast his eyes on the baronet than he felt assured that his wily debtor no longer feared him, and that his money, somehow or other, was within reach. His own deportment therefore immediately changed as perceptibly as that of the high and mighty gentleman before whom he stood—no pair of scales were ever more nicely balanced. As Sir George grew more and more sternly dignified, Mr. Cromwell became more and more obsequious. Nevertheless, though the change was no doubt piquant and agreeable enough, the gay baronet was exceedingly sick of the sight of him; and having indulged himself with one look, very literally *de haut en bas*, at the bowing money-lender, he once again drew forth his book of checks, drew for the sum required, and having signed his name and torn out the page, laid his extended palm upon it as if he feared its being snatched at by his companion, and uttered, with an emphasis which displayed considerable dignity,

“The bill, sir, if you please.”

There was no unnecessary delay in the production of this instrument, and Sir George having by the intervention of the fire-tongs conveyed it to the centre of the fire, and held it there till it was evident that not even Mr. Cromwell could use it further, he once more turned his eyes upon that bowing individual, and said,

“I am busy, sir, and the sooner you permit me to be alone, the better.”

“I hope, Sir George, that you will not take amiss any thing that has passed to-day. I wouldn't on any account whatever offend any gentleman if it was possible any how to avoid it; but you see, Sir George—” And the money-lender paused with a penitent and humble look.

The baronet rang the bell sharply, and the ready William was in an instant before him.

“The door,” pronounced with a certain intonation perfectly intelligible to the domestic (and probably to the visiter), caused that accomplished functionary first to throw wide the portal, and then so to place himself relatively to the personage he was about to wait upon, as to render it very evident, that if he did not instantly avail himself of the means of *exit* thus provided,

he should consider it as his duty to make him do so, by some very summary process.

It entered not into Mr. Cromwell's tactics to offer any further opposition, but bowing very reverentially as he passed out, he disappeared without uttering another word; leaving his customer in the happiest possible state of spirits, and by no means displeased that the interview had ended at last, without any such violent demonstration of disgust on either part, as must have rendered any future one impossible.

While this was going on in the library, Mr. Dalrymple pursued his way to the dining-room. It was long since he had felt so happy as he did at the moment when he extended his hand to open the door. For that moment, at least, his self-reproaches, his struggles, and his resolutions were forgotten. He remembered only that he had been useful to Clara, and that he should have the delight of knowing that the sorrow he expected to read in her dark thoughtful eye existed no longer. For one moment then he paused to enjoy this delightful thought, and in the next she stood before him, blushing, agitated, and lovelier than ever—but—with her extended hand resting on that of Charles Chesterfield!

Had the shock been less violent, it would have made him retreat, but, as it was, all power of thought and action seemed to have left him, and he stood rooted to the floor with his distended eyes fixed upon her, in unutterable astonishment and dismay.

And how came it that Clara's hand was resting upon that of Charles Chesterfield? Terrible was the effect, nothing could be more innocent than the cause.

She had witnessed the manner in which, during breakfast, her father had drawn from his little purse the half-sovereign and four shillings (for she had keenly watched the transaction) and had instantly made up her mind to find or make an early opportunity of repaying him. It was with this view that she had descended to the dining-room a few minutes earlier than usual, determined, if the young man obeyed her father's intimation that he was to come to luncheon, that she would make use of the first moment possible for effecting her purpose.

Charles had in effect entered the room almost at the same moment as herself, and after permitting him to indulge his growing courage by answering a few of his questions, she suddenly drew from her bag a bit of paper in which the exact sum was enveloped, and said, "By the way, Mr. Chesterfield, I have it in charge to repay you what you lent to my father this morning," and she stretched out her hand to meet his.

Notwithstanding his rustic ignorance, Charles was not so per-

fectly without *tact* as to think he ought to receive this money; nevertheless there was a feeling of repugnance to the stretching out his hand for it, which made him stand for a minute as if undecided; and then it was that she laid her hand with the money in it upon his—and then it was too that the door opened, and Mr. Dalrymple entered.

Arthur Dalrymple saw that she blushed, and fancied too that she looked agitated; nor was he much deceived in this, for the instant her eyes fell upon him, her heart bounded in her bosom, and nothing but her habitual self-control enabled her now, as it had done a hundred times before, to recover herself sufficiently to address him with composure. He, too, struggled with the feelings that seemed almost choking him, and contrived to say, “Your father, Miss Meddows, has sent me to join your party at luncheon. Will you permit me to do so?”

Clara’s strictly-regulated system in every thing which related to her intercourse with Mr. Dalrymple was such as to render it very difficult, if not altogether impossible, for him to suspect that he was not an object of perfect indifference to her. Notwithstanding the new lights which of late have been thrown among the fair maidens of our isle, the most of them, I believe, still persist in preferring the dear delight of being chosen, to the glorious freedom of having leave to choose; but in poor Clara’s case there were many reasons which multiplied this natural feeling a hundredfold. If she had not what is vulgarly called a proud spirit, she had all that constitutes a noble one; and it was pain and grief, even to bitterness, for her to feel that she might have loved, that she could have loved—alas! alas! that she *did* love—almost the only disengaged man of her acquaintance who had never given any indication of being in danger of loving her. To avoid seeing him was impossible. Her father’s intercourse with him prevented the possibility of retreating from danger in this way; and she had long, therefore, with the desperate courage of a martyr, abandoned every hope of escape, and directed all her efforts to the one uniform object of concealing what she felt. Even her lynx-eyed aunt was puzzled if not altogether blinded by this, and perpetually varied in her opinion as to whether Clara was deeply in love with the cold and stately Dalrymple, or only proudly bent on showing him that she did not care a straw for his indifference. Between this lady and her brother, it had long been understood that he would be a most desirable match for the young lady, and that all the usual process of continual invitations, peculiar kindness, flattering distinction, and marked intimacy of manner, was to be gone through in order to secure him. All this the indignant Clara saw and knew,

and lived in perpetual terror lest Dalrymple should see and know it too. A more ordinary-minded girl might have pouted under this, and avenged her wounded vanity by taking care to let the gentleman see that she thought him exceedingly disagreeable. But such was not the result of her long and frequent meditations on her own painful history. Instead of treating him with flip-pant neglect, or sarcastic vivacity, her quiet gentle manner varied not from the tone of friendly ease and familiarity which the frequency of their intercourse rendered natural; and, if it sometimes happened that their conversation had more of intellect and interest than either party found when conversing elsewhere, it was considered by each as the inevitable consequence of the mental superiority of the other.

If it ever happened, too, as at the present moment, that the unexpected appearance of the one caused evident emotion in the other, it was invariably attributed by both to some other cause. And thus it was now, as Clara turned her beaming eyes and glowing cheeks towards Dalrymple, that his very soul revolted from the beauty of that heightened glow; for he attributed it to the near approach of the audacious peasant before him, instead of reading in it the strong emotion which his own unexpected appearance before them never failed to produce.

And where was the sadness and the sorrow he had been taught to expect in her aspect and in her voice? Rarely had he seen her look so cheerful. She had just performed a necessary but disagreeable task. She expected to see Mr. Dalrymple at her party in the evening; and now he had made his appearance without being expected at all! Poor Clara looked positively happy as she held out her hand to welcome him; and considering that, according to her father's statement, she was perfectly aware of the tremendous embarrassment which she herself had caused, and totally ignorant of the assistance by which it had been removed, it can hardly be wondered at, if the sensitive young man felt more surprised than pleased by her gaiety, or if the cruel thought occurred, that a woman more perfectly English in her education would have felt and behaved differently. How much the presence of Charles Chesterfield, and the recollection of Clara's hand extended towards him, might have increased the severity of the judgment which he thus passed upon her, it might be difficult to say; but it is certain that his manner became so cold both to the lady and gentleman, that Charles felt the gratitude which was rising to his lips fall back, as it were, into his bosom, and the gaiety of Clara passed away like a gleam of April sunshine before a heavy cloud.

CHAPTER XIII.

An Evening Party—An European Celebrity—A Treaty on the Basis of Reciprocal Advantages—"La dolce Lingua"—Charles is exposed to a new Danger.

At the usual hour for assembling together the population of metropolitan drawing-rooms, those of Clara began to fill; nor was it long before that indescribable sound was heard through them, which, like the gurgling of the waves upon a pebbly shore, shows that the tide is in.

Mr. and Mrs. Gibson, Miss Almeria, and Miss Theodosia were among the first who entered: for though they chose to be "*very distinguished people*," Mrs. Gibson piqued herself on having raised her whole family to that position without having condescended to adopt any of the more ordinary modes of obtaining it. Mrs. Gibson knew perfectly well that "*very distinguished people*" who are not born to greatness, but achieve it, make the appearing exceedingly late, wherever they are expected to appear at all, a constant habit, cheap in adoption, and productive of considerable effect. So far the practice might certainly have suited her well, and she might have been tempted to adopt it, had it not militated against her very nature, by keeping her quiet when she had the means of being in a bustle, out of sight when she might be looked at, and out of hearing when she had a chance of being listened to. The Gibson family were, therefore, always early; for, as every body who had the pleasure of Mrs. Gibson's acquaintance knew, her will was law, and it was her will that so it should be.

Neither Sir George nor Mrs. Longuéville had entered the room when they arrived; the former being still engaged in sipping claret with two gentlemen who had dined with him, and the latter stretched full-dressed on a sofa in her bed-room, half asleep, and half listening to the tittle-tattle of her French maid. But Charles Chesterfield was there, dressed in a town-made suit, according to the orders of Sir George, and looking so happy and so handsome that what with his appearance, and the aristocratic domicile in which he appeared—the absence of more important objects, and the recollection of his publishing propensities, Mrs. Gibson seized upon him with an affectionate familiarity that made his heart bound with gratitude, and placed him as nearly at his ease as it was possible for him to be, at this his second appearance in public, and his first in a style of dress entirely new to him.

"What a treat it is to catch you for a moment before your rooms are full, dearest Clara!" exclaimed Almeria, as she pressed the hand of Miss Meddows to her bosom with both her own; rousing her courage to this very familiar address, for the sake of displaying to her mother and sister the terms on which she stood

with her elegant friend. "What an age, dear friend, has it appeared to me since we met last!"

Nothing could be much more unmeaning than the absent smile with which Clara received this address; but it mattered not, it did exceedingly well for Miss Almeria, who replied to it by saying with a sigh,

"Ah! that smile, dear friend! what volumes it speaks! Yes—you are right—quite right, dear! What I would say to you is for the boudoir, and not for the drawing-room. *Attendons, attendons, chère amie!*"

"And what have you been doing since we parted?" said Mrs. Gibson, laying her fan carelessly on the shoulder of Charles. "What would I not give to be in your confidence, fully in your confidence, Mr. Chesterfield! I have it from the very best, the very best and highest authority—you may guess whom I mean—that there is that within you which will blaze forth ere long, and astonish us all," and she touched her forehead significantly as she spoke. Poor Charles! This was indeed fooling him to the top of his bent; he felt half way to paradise, and, giving way to the titillating excitement, he permitted the energetic lady to lead him off to a distant sofa, where he actually recited to her enraptured ear a sonnet to the river Wade, a brisk little trout-stream, on whose banks he had culled cowslips for Bessy before the hope of ever conversing with a literary London lady had visited him, even in his dreams. It is true his voice trembled, but he recited the lines distinctly.

"I have no words, upon my honour, Mr. Chesterfield; I am at a loss how to express to you the emotions you have made me feel!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson. "Oh! what exquisite enjoyment it is for a mind like mine to meet a talent so rich and rare, and a spirit so perfectly *unblazé*! You must forgive me, Mr. Chesterfield, if you now and then catch me making a new word, when I can find no old one to suit me. Poetic licence is granted, you know, even by the severest academies, and why may not an *expression*-licence, as I call it, be accorded to those whose thoughts are too copious to find sufficient vent in our ordinary vocabulary? Would it not be tyranny to deny it to us?"

"Indeed I think so," replied Charles, by no means disposed to differ on any subject with so kind a friend, though utterly at a loss to guess what *unblazé* might be.

"You will come to me on Tuesday evening without fail? don't forget my Tuesdays, Mr. Chesterfield! every Tuesday till the end of the season, I shall receive, *sans faute*, and I shall decidedly quarrel with you if you forget it." It was with much greater sincerity than such speeches are usually made, that Charles assured

her it would be impossible he should ever forget an invitation of hers, and that Tuesday would never be a red-letter day to him.

While this was going on in one part of the room, Theodosia was examining the music-books in another; while her father, being very particularly disengaged, endeavoured to assist her, though, in doing so, he had to endure many strong though very affectionate reprimands, concerning various little defects in his style.

“Dearest papa!” exclaimed the young lady, “never, while you live, open a music-book in that manner! It is a perfect atrocity, upon my honour it is. Take care, my dear pet papa, what you are about. Don’t mix the songs and concertos together! I suppose I shall be expected to play, and I shall be lost if you do. For goodness sake, dear, do put your gloves on! you have no idea how horribly vulgar you look. Mercy on me, dear! what would become of you without me?”

Almeria, meanwhile, was displaying towards Clara an affection that really seemed to have no bounds, till at length Sir George Meddows and his dinner guests entered, and then a change came over her. The rooms were now getting full, and it became easy enough for a skilful young lady to win her way towards any part of them which she happened to like best, without exciting any troublesome degree of attention. Mrs. Longuéville had by this time emerged from her retreat, and swam through the apartments with a movement as soft as that of her own plumes, enjoying as she passed along all the consequence of being at home, while she left all the trouble of it to her niece. For this tall and stately body, who was ever peculiarly austere in her deportment towards young female pretenders, unless their claims were supported by the right divine of rank or fashion, Miss Almeria Gibson entertained the most peculiar aversion, and she avoided her path with very excellent pilotage. But the skill of her movements was not confined to the avoiding one particular track; it showed itself at least equally well in the manner in which she pursued another. Sir George rambled on, purposely making his path as devious as possible, for the purpose of distributing civil words as far and wide as he could before he sat down to his whist-table; but however varied the direction in which he moved, the roving eye of Almeria was upon him, and exactly as often as it was possible for her to do so without danger of startling the quarry, she was at hand to say some of those graceful, lively, captivating little speeches by which young ladies, in the style of Miss Almeria, venture to propitiate and attract gentlemen of fifty. At length, however, his public duty being performed, he ventured to give himself to his private amusement; and, as usual, making his own

party sit down to pass the next three or four hours at whist. Scarcely had he established himself in this haven of his wishes, ere the fair Almeria contrived to find a chair behind him, which she drew so close that her chin almost touched his shoulder.

“Don’t send me away, Sir George!” she said in a soft yet playful voice. “I dote upon whist! and moreover, I always bring luck to those I wish it for,” she added, in his ear. “So do not chase me.”

“Chase you!” he replied. “Nay, pray sit closer to me, Miss Almeria! Closer still! I assure you that I now feel invincible.”

She did sit close to him, very close, and such flattering delight did she display when things went well with him, and so deep was the soft sigh that fanned his cheek when he lost the odd trick, or had honours counted against him, that upon one occasion, when his partner was dealing, he left his chair, and making his way to an idle gossiping personage at some distance, he said in his ear,

“Can you tell me, Marshal, which of the Gibson girls it is who has got the fortune? Is it Almeria? That one, I mean, who is sitting yonder.”

“Yes, yes, it is Almeria,” replied the person he addressed, who was one of those from whom no one ever received, in answer to an inquiry, the dull reply, “I don’t know;” rather than be supposed not to know every thing, Mr. Marshal would have affirmed any thing. So Sir George went back to his card-table under the persuasion that the fair nymph so decidedly well-disposed towards him, was the independent possessor of twenty thousand pounds and one whom it might be exceedingly well worth while to think about.

While these matters proceeded in the tranquillity of the inner room, a good deal of sensation was excited in the outer one, by the name of MRS. SHERBOURNE, very audibly announced at the door of it. Every eye turned towards the spot where she was expected to appear, but it was still a minute or two before she became visible; and during this interval, Mrs. Gibson, with her arm resting on that of young Chesterfield, made her way to the place where Miss Meddows stood ready to receive her celebrated guest, determined to be within reach of an immediate presentation.

“This is quite an European celebrity, Mr. Chesterfield,” she said, strenuously dragging him forward. “We must get Miss Meddows to present us before she is too much surrounded. I have never yet made her acquaintance, and it is rather an object to me. When she finds out our intimacy with Marchmont, of course she will be at our feet—or, if not, must pay the penalty. You can guess what that is, Mr. Chesterfield, can’t you? though happily no such danger is before you.”

“You must forgive my country ignorance, Mrs. Gibson,” replied Charles, though without blushing half so much as he would have done a week before; for he was improving rapidly. “But to say the truth, I do not know what you mean by having to pay a penalty. Will you explain it?”

“It might frighten some young authors to death,” replied Mrs. Gibson, laughing. “Nevertheless, I may venture to tell *you*, because you are one of us, and quite out of danger, I hope. But the penalty of not standing well with Mr. Marchmont is utter destruction, believe me, to all literary hopes—except in some very out-of-the-way cases indeed, where nothing good or bad seems to make any difference. But, speaking in general, nobody can have any hope of getting on if Marchmont is against him. Never forget that, my dear young friend, whatever you do. The sun has not more certain power of giving light, than Marchmont has of giving fame—or blasting it.”

“Is it possible,” said Charles, looking a little dismayed, “that the neglect of one distinguished man can produce such withering effects?”

“His *neglect*?” rejoined Mrs. Gibson, shaking her head mysteriously. “I don’t quite say that—but here she comes! Good gracious! how little she is! And perfectly a Frenchwoman in appearance isn’t she? I am enchanted! How very eccentric! How perfectly *distinguée*! How odd!”

This description was so just, that it requires little addition. Mrs. Sherbourne was certainly one of the smallest women in existence, and all that dress could do to make her look unlike an Englishwoman had been done.

“Introduce me, I entreat you!” cried Mrs. Gibson, in the ear of Clara, as the pale, large-eyed, little lady drew near. “I am absolutely dying to make her acquaintance!”

Miss Meddows received her remarkable-looking visiter very gracefully, but was almost startled out of her wonted equanimity by the manner in which she was addressed in return.

“*Mais c’est une éternité!*” exclaimed Mrs. Sherbourne, seizing her two hands, and kissing her first on one cheek and then on the other,—“*mais c’est une éternité depuis que je vous ai vue!*”

“It is indeed a long time,” replied Clara, quietly. “It is three years, is it not, since you left Paris for Rome? Nay, more than that, it is nearly four.”

“*Le moyen de conter un tel intervalle!*” cried Mrs. Sherbourne, raising her prodigiously large eyes towards heaven, and still holding Clara’s imprisoned hands pressed closely to her bosom.

“I hope you have not quite lost the power of speaking English, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne,” said Miss Meddows, smiling, “or we

shall get on very badly, for I have totally lost the habit of speaking any thing else—and I know not if I shall be able to understand you.”

“*Come! anche la bella lingua! non è possibile!*” replied Mrs. Sherbourne, in an accent of despair.

“All *linguas* but my own, I do assure you,” returned Clara, laughing. But every body here, you know, understands English, so I manage very well.” Mrs. Sherbourne said nothing in reply, but sighed deeply, and dropped the young lady’s hands without again pressing them to her heart.

“Give me leave, Mrs. Sherbourne, to introduce Mrs. Gibson to you,” said Clara. She is exceedingly desirous of making your acquaintance.”

It was impossible Miss Meddows could have taken a more favourable moment for the purpose. There was something so nearly approaching to adoration in the look and attitude of Mrs. Gibson, as she drew near to second the motion, that the miniature muse felt soothed and comforted after the shock of finding that she was expected to restrain the expression of her feelings to the homely idiom of her native land; and when Mrs. Gibson, seizing with a powerful arm upon two vacant chairs, placed one for the little celebrity, and the other for herself, they sat down together, not vulgarly side by side, but intellectually, face to face, with almost an equal desire of being irresistibly agreeable. When Mrs. Gibson dropped the arm of Charles in order to be presented to the star of the evening—a luminary generally more bright, though less tranquil than the evening star—he had remained exactly where she left him transfixed, as it seemed, by the apparition of this new “European celebrity;” and after the first burst of that eloquence was over which always wells forth from such a soul as Mrs. Gibson’s, at the approach of any body who has published a great many works, he had the unspeakable delight of being beckoned forward by his generous friend, and presented to Mrs. Sherbourne as one of the most promising literary debutants of the age. Mrs. Sherbourne raised and fixed her great eyes upon him with a vast deal of kindness.

“Astrologers read destiny in the stars, and poets read poetry in the eyes,” said she. “In both cases the lore is occult. Caviare to the multitude! Is it not so, dear sir?”

As Charles smiled, blushed, and said nothing, Mrs. Gibson answered for him.

“Oh! what a thought! and how expressed!” she exclaimed. “Is not this happiness, Mr. Chesterfield? To welcome such a spirit as this back to its native land! To catch almost the first notes that fall from the lips of the siren, before the eager, listen-

ing, expectant world has seized and wrapped her in its multitudinous embrace! To me it is ecstasy. I have no words to paint it. Alas! when the heart is full, how treacherously disobedient is the tongue, ever refusing to find words for its too eloquent master! Fly, and take possession of that vacant chair, Chesterfield. Place yourself there, and let us listen to her."

"Your kindness, my dear madam," said Mrs. Sherbourne, meekly, "is most welcome to my feelings. There is something fearfully trying to a mimosa-like mind such as mine, in returning from the warm and sunny light of Italy, to the atmosphere of our chill isle! To intelligence such as yours, I need scarcely say that I speak figuratively, as well as literally. You have been in Italy?"

"Alas, never!" returned Mrs. Gibson, with a sort of flashing eye that seemed to accuse somebody of having done something to cause the unnatural restraint which had withheld her.

"Nor you, young friend?" demanded the gifted lady, turning towards Charles; but his tongue being evidently in the rebellious humour described by Mrs. Gibson, he only replied by expressively shaking his head.

"Nay, then, you know not how much I want your kindness!" resumed the plaintive star. "Could you but imagine the warmth, the enthusiasm of dear classic Italy, for all that appertains to mind, you would understand it better. It is very trying,—fearfully trying," and she pressed her swelling heart with her little hands, "for—why should I scruple to pronounce the word?—for a poet to travel from Italy to England as fast as post-horses can carry him! Oh!" she added, with a visible shudder, "it is so like climbing amidst glaciers, after luxuriating in a valley rich in sunshine, and enamelled with flowers of a thousand dyes. So like changing day for night, and light for darkness."

"Where is the bold reasoner that would venture to say it is not so?" replied Mrs. Gibson, looking as if she were very much ashamed of having been born in England: but after a moment's pause, she added, as if wishing to plead for pardon in the case of herself and her particular friends, under a disgrace to which they were forced to plead guilty. "Yet do not think, do not, I implore you, conceive for a moment, that even England will be insensible to the glory and happiness of possessing you again. No! it will not, it cannot be so! I can answer at least for our small circle, a circle not perhaps the least remarkable of the many formed by the converging intelligences of this great metropolis, and one in the centre of which I trust that Mrs. Sherbourne will often condescend to shine."

"Mrs. Sherbourne bowed, and said with her eyes, "What is it you mean? Explain yourself, dear flattering friend."

“I speak with all humility of the literary society which assembles every Tuesday evening at my house in Baker-street,” replied Mrs. Gibson; “believe me, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, you will be received with an ovation there. I have four daughters who adore your name; and Mr. Gibson also, who in his way is one of the best of men, and, to do him justice, worships, though at a distance, the intellectual lights among which he lives, venerates your reputation, and will zealously assist his family to welcome you as you deserve.”

“I am deeply grateful,” replied Mrs. Sherbourne, in an accent of great sensibility, “deeply grateful to you all.”

“Oh, do not speak thus! the gratitude will all be ours! But I rejoice to say, that in my drawing-rooms you will meet with one to whom, I will not scruple to confess, it is an advantage to be known. The name of Marchmont can hardly be a stranger to your ears, Mrs. Sherbourne? You must have heard of Mr. Marchmont?”

“I blush to say that many of the most illustrious among my countrymen are as yet unknown to me,” replied the celebrity.

“My residence abroad has been so long, and I have so exclusively devoted myself to studying the genius of the various nations among whom I have lived, that I have still all to learn at home.”

“Of Mr. Marchmont’s importance in the literary world of London, you will soon become aware,” replied Mrs. Gibson: “when I tell you that he is the editor of *The Regenerator*, I give you a key that will enable you very soon to comprehend the value of his friendship. It is a name that carries both hope and fear with it.”

“The editor of *The Regenerator*! Are you intimate with him, my dear madam?” demanded Mrs. Sherbourne, in a tone that showed a good deal of newly-awakened interest.

“Intimate?” returned Mrs. Gibson with a triumphant smile; “I am proud to say that he almost lives with us!”

“You will indeed do me a great favour by making me known to him,” said Mrs. Sherbourne, anxiously. “If I mistake not, *The Regenerator* has a weekly article on the theatre?”

“Why, as to that,” said Mrs. Gibson, with a very expressive little laugh, “I think I could let you into a secret. The fact is,” she continued, lowering her voice, “that from Sir Everard Little downwards, there is not a single dramatist at the present time who dare venture a piece till he has privately given them his opinion of it, or at least the promise of a favouring word.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Mrs. Sherbourne, speaking without any lisp, drawl, or foreign grace whatever. “Every thing for me depends upon the success of the piece which I have just got

accepted at Drury-lane! For Heaven's sake, my dear madam, tell me what I had better do about it? Does your friend Mr. Marchmont read all the pieces in manuscript before they are acted?"

"Oh, Heavens! no—he writes immensely, you know."

"Then how is it to be managed? How may I propitiate him?"

"I am sure it will give me the greatest pleasure in the world, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, to be in any degree useful to you," replied Mrs. Gibson, assuming her best patronizing tone, and seeming to enjoy the finding herself quite at ease again, after the fatigue of paying her court to the "European celebrity."

"I cannot thank you enough. Tuesday? your evening is Tuesday? I suppose it would be impossible for me to see him before? Yet I should greatly wish it. Do you think it would be impossible?"

"Impossible? Oh no, certainly not impossible for any friend of mine. He is *répandu* beyond any thing you can conceive; but I have little doubt that if I make a point of it, he will meet you any evening you will name, if you will make the meeting-place my drawing-room."

"Good Heavens! how kind, how generously kind to a stranger," said the delighted celebrity, seizing the hand of her new friend. "Will you promise to tell me in what way I can show my gratitude? There is nothing I would not do to prove how deeply I feel your kindness."

"My dear Mrs. Sherbourne, I am one of those who, when they take a fancy, never spare exertion and energy to prove the sincerity of it. Your works have delighted us, and, beyond all doubt, the personal introduction with which I have been favoured this evening is greatly calculated to increase the interest they have inspired. Nothing will be wanting on my part to forward your interest; and on yours, my dear madam, it is so easy, where there are amiable, intelligent, young people, for a person in your situation to gratify them, that I feel quite certain the intercourse will be mutually beneficial. We all dote upon rehearsals, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, and if you reserve a box for yourself on the first night, you could not gratify any of us more than by letting us join your party in it."

"Of course I should be delighted! You are so good, so amiable, that I throw myself wholly at your feet; make me but favourably known to Mr. Marchmont, and I am your vowed slave for ever! Nor can I doubt that what gratitude begins affection will complete; I feel convinced that I shall love you all."

"You shall have no reason to complain of me," returned the highly delighted Mrs. Gibson; "and, *par exemple*, I can do you another very essential service if you are not yet provided with a

prologue. If the question be not indiscreet, tell me if you are provided with this essential auxiliary."

"Ah! that I am not," returned the little lady, mournfully.

"Mr. Chesterfield! draw near," said Mrs. Gibson, in a half-whisper. "Tell me, young friend, think you not that, under the presiding eye of our friend Marchmont, you could compose a prologue for Mrs. Sherbourne's new play? Such a one as might be advantageous to her, and honourable to yourself?"

"I should be delighted to attempt it," replied Charles, eagerly. "Is it a tragedy, Mrs. Sherbourne, or a comedy?"

"It is rather difficult to answer the question, Mr. Chesterfield," replied Mrs. Sherbourne, rolling her eyes in a wandering doubtful glance, which spoke both indecision and genius, "It must, think, be classed as neither, but content itself with the safer, because less defined, title of 'a Drama.' Will you really have the excessive kindness to produce a prologue for me?"

"I will certainly make the attempt, ma'am," he repeated, "and should Mr. Marchmont think it worthy of your acceptance, I shall feel very happy indeed—nothing could give me greater pleasure."

"How can I thank you? Do you think it would amuse you to attend my rehearsals, Mr. Chesterfield? Speak freely."

What a question was this? Would it amuse him? Excepting the having a play of his own to watch through the delicious process of adaptation to the stage, the imagination of Charles Chesterfield could hardly have suggested any thing he should like one-hundredth part as well. Though he was making very rapid progress in his metropolitan education, it was still impossible for him altogether to conceal the rapture this question occasioned him, and his voice almost trembled with delight, as he replied,

"I know nothing in the world that I should like so well. There is nothing I would not attempt to obtain it, Mrs. Sherbourne."

"*Eh bene! Sono felicissima!* We will make a bargain then. You shall write a prologue for me, and I will take you to my rehearsals. *N'est-ce pas? C'est une affaire finie.*"

Poor Charles would have been very thankful if Mrs. Sherbourne could have managed to speak to him in English. But far too happy, from what he did understand, to complain of what he did not, he thanked her with all the glowing grace of sincerity, and determined to retire early, for the purpose of sketching a prologue before he went to rest. The party however being large, and, as it seemed to him, very brilliant, he thought he would indulge himself before he went by gazing on the gay scene from

a snug retreat which he had found on a neglected chair behind the door. Inexpressibly happy from the employment given him, and the reward promised for it, he was quite unconscious of any mortification from being alone and neglected. The Gibsons, particularly the three ladies, all came with the determination of being exceedingly civil to him, but, excepting during the scene above described, they had all forgotten it. Miss Almeria was very much engaged indeed at the card-table; where, since the short absence of Sir George, during which he had acquired the important false information above stated, her *petits soins* had been met by so much gratitude, and returned with such liberal interest, that it was quite impossible she could think of any thing else. Mr. Gibson, though theoretically preferring intellectual conversation to every thing else in the world, was nevertheless practically fond of a rubber when he could get it, and was positively enjoying the honour of playing at the same table as the elegant Mrs. Longuéville. When Charles withdrew himself, and his joy, from the side of the celebrity and Mrs. Gibson, the two ladies continued to converse together very affectionately, interrupted only by such introductions to the authoress as the weary Clara was specially requested to perform. At length, however, finding Mrs. Sherbourne's oblivion of her own language, and partiality for that of Italy, increased as the crowd thickened round her, Mrs. Gibson, moved by that strong principle of our nature, maternal love, called her Theodosia to her side, feeling that it was impossible she should ever have a more admirable opportunity of displaying the accomplishment in which she was so pre-eminent, than the present.

"Permit me," she said, "to present to you my daughter, Theodosia, Mrs. Sherbourne. Her passion for the sweet language of Italy equals your own. You will find but few in England, I fear, as capable as she is of appreciating your beautiful accent."

"Ah! she speaks Italian? That will indeed be a relief to me!" replied Mrs. Sherbourne, plaintively, "*Cara mia signora! ho avuto impedimenti incredibili per trovarmi un'amica come voi! Parleremo dunque, sempre, sempre parleremo in questa dolce idioma ch'entrambi amiamo tanto.*"

Though a little startled by the closeness of the attack upon her parts of speech, Theodosia was determined to sustain her Tuscan reputation, and, perceiving that Mrs. Sherbourne's looks were very affectionate, she replied exactly in the tender accent her music-master had taught her, "*Caro tesoro mio!*"

The celebrity looked puzzled, but suddenly fancying, or remembering, that some sonnet or canzone opened with these words,

she presumed that her new friend was about to regale her with a little splendid recitation, and assuming a poetical look, one-fourth criticism and three-fourths ecstasy, she exclaimed, "*Ah! non arrestarvi!*"

"*Vorrei, ma non potrei,*" replied Theodosia, very cleverly.

"*Ma sì, carissima! Andate sempre, vi prego! La poesia è l'atmosfera nella quale respiro con piacere sovrano!*"

This exquisite dialogue was interrupted by an acquaintance of Mrs. Gibson's, a sensible-looking old gentleman, who came up to her chair to pay his compliments to her, and remained for a minute or two behind it to listen to the unknown tongue that assailed his ears.

"That's a foreign lady, I presume, ma'am?" he said, addressing Mrs. Gibson. "Pray what country may she come from?"

"Delicious!" cried Mrs. Gibson, joyously clapping her hands.

"Do listen to this immense compliment, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne. Mr. Allanby, one of the cleverest men in the world, has been listening, I don't know how long, to your conversation, and at last has come to the conclusion that you are a foreigner. Is not that a compliment?"

"It is, indeed," replied Mrs. Sherbourne, casting down her eyes with very charming modesty; "but I have been too long accustomed to speak Italian to deserve any credit for it."

"You are an English woman, madam," said the old gentleman, looking at her with rather a remarkable expression,—"An English woman, and receive it as a compliment to be taken for any thing else? Very strange! Very strange, certainly! You are thankful for small favours, madam," and so saying the old gentleman made her a stiff bow and walked off.

It sometimes happens that persons we consider as exceedingly contemptible in themselves utter platitudes which produce very considerable effect. So it was with the old gentleman; Mrs. Sherbourne and Miss Theodosia, though despising him intensely in their hearts, talked no more Italian that night; nay, the younger lady was afterwards heard to mention this rebuff as a reason for not talking it any more till the fashion became more general.

"It is so disagreeable," said she, "to feel that one draws all eyes upon one! Greatly as I prefer Italian to every other language, I really think for the present I shall abstain from speaking it. It will be lost."

"Dear me! Do you think so?" replied her sister Almeria.

While this promising intimacy was cementing between the Gibson family and Mrs. Sherbourne, Clara wandered about, endeavouring to be very civil to every one, yet, in spite of her-

self, turning her eye to the door every time it opened, in the vain hope of seeing Dalrymple enter; but though engaged by promise to attend her party, the recollections of the morning were not only powerful enough to make him break this promise, but also to make another to himself, whereby he pledged himself, under pain of self-contempt which was to have no end, never again to permit a weak admiration for beauty, grace, and intelligence, to beguile him into fancying that qualities of more sterling value were joined with them. Happily, however, for poor Clara, she guessed not the cause of his absence, and at length satisfied her unspoiled spirit by remembering that he would certainly call on the morrow to account for his absence. It was exactly the time that she had made up her mind thus to console herself, that she remarked the solitary position of Charles, who, seemingly apart from all the rest, looked greatly like a person fallen from the moon amidst a world of which he knew nothing, and in which nobody knew him.

“Poor fellow!” she muttered, “what cruelty it seems to have beguiled him from his rustic rhymes, and the dear themes which inspired them, up to the heartless puppet-show of London!” and, thoughtless or indifferent as to the appearance of such marked attention, she made her way with considerable difficulty to a chair beside him, and placed herself in it, entered most good-humouredly into conversation with him, pointing out by name the persons most distinguished, and asking his opinion of the different young ladies present, as being, she thought, the readiest mode of making him speak in return.

The first impression which Charles Chesterfield had made upon Miss Meddows, on the day he dined at the Grange, was that of a person suffering so painfully from shyness as to render the wild scheme of bringing him to London an act of perfect cruelty. Certain suspicions, too, as to her father’s motives for this scheme, had made him an object of interest and compassion to her, which, joined to the capricious manner in which he was treated, wavering as it did from familiar kindness to imperious insolence, led her to consider it as a needful act of duty on her part to atone to him, as well as she could, for the discomforts of his situation. She resolutely determined to watch over his much-endangered interest, and thus render the consequences of the folly which his parents had committed in sending him on this wild-goose expedition as little injurious to him as possible. Beautiful women are often accused, and not always unjustly, of keeping the memory of their beauty ever with them; nevertheless, it does sometimes happen that they sin from forgetting it. The idea that while endeavouring to atone to Charles for the evils

her father had brought upon him, she might chance to turn his head, never for an instant entered hers; and, considering that she knew the youth to be a poet, this was very thoughtless. She made another blunder too. Instead of bestowing all this flattering kindness upon a timid boy, whose very soul, as she fancied, was blushing within him, it fell upon a young and very excitable imagination, at a moment when it and its owner were perfectly intoxicated with ambition, drunk with gratified vanity, and reeling under an accumulation of happiness almost greater than he could bear.

Charles did not reply to Clara's questions, as to whether he thought the young lady in pink prettier than the young lady in white, or the young lady in white prettier than the young lady in pink, by telling her that she was herself a hundred thousand times handsomer than either; but he thought so, nevertheless; and he thought also that there was something most uncommonly kind and flattering in her coming thus and talking to him, in preference to all the fine people who filled the rooms. Charles, however, was no coxcomb. This kindness touched his heart, more than it did his vanity; and if the gratitude he felt was a great deal warmer than she intended to inspire, it was joined with a degree of respect which almost amounted to reverence.

This brightest of evenings wore very rapidly away in his estimation, though to poor Clara it seemed almost preternaturally long. Both, however, perceived that it was drawing to its close, for the rooms were thinning rapidly; till at last the persons who formed Sir George's whist-table and the Gibson family alone remained.

Before this time, however, a good deal of business had been done. Mr. Gibson had had the honour of losing three pounds ten to Mrs. Longuéville; Mrs. Gibson had obtained Mrs. Sherbourne's promise for a variety of gratifying little literary privileges which only such authors as Mrs. Sherbourne can bestow, and only such ladies as Mrs. Gibson properly esteem.

Miss Theodosia Gibson, after a few doubts and fears on the subject, had ended by determining to trust to her own conscious powers of display and evasion, and ventured to elect herself to the place of Mrs. Sherbourne's most intimate friend, notwithstanding her alarming love for the Italian language; and Miss Almeria was ready to declare that she had passed one of the most delightful evenings of her life, for Sir George had continually leant back in his chair to show her his hand, and paid her so many other pleasing but undefinable little attentions, that she dreamed three times before she got up the next morning, of hearing herself called 'my lady,' and of having a son and heir who was to be a baronet.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Lion at Home—Modern Literature—Its Divisions—and Principles—Charles determines to commence his Education anew.

CHARLES was in no sleeping mood when he returned to his lodgings, and having invested himself in a comfortable dressing-gown, the joint production of his mother and poor little Bessy, he opened his writing-desk, determined to sketch at least the plan of the promised prologue before he went to bed. Being a good deal more familiar with the Greek drama than with that of our own degenerate days, his first notion was that the fittest form for the composition he had undertaken was that of an opening speech ; and he had already written about half a dozen lines of very classical structure, when he fortunately recollected having seen sundry prologues and epilogues by Garrick, and it struck him as probable that something of the same kind would be more conformable to the fashion of the present day.

Under this impression he composed one of those platitudes which are, for the most part, the result of a predetermination to be bright, pointed, neat, and elegant, when a fluttering heart and unpractised hand undertakes the task. It would be doing him injustice to say he was quite satisfied with what he had done,—but at least he was very sleepy, and with the love of his pillow before his eyes as much, or, at that moment, perhaps more than the love of fame, he rubbed his eyes, muttered “ That must do,” and crept to bed.

It had been agreed on the preceding evening that as soon as his composition was finished, he should wait upon Mrs. Sherbourne with it ; and, having waked at an hour considerably later than usual, he hurried over a solitary breakfast at his lodgings, wrote out the lines fairly, and set off. But ere he had taken a dozen steps, it occurred to him that notwithstanding his fortunate recollection of Garrick, it was highly probable he might still have produced something not in exact accordance with the theatrical fashion of the present day. Were this the case, he should commit a two-fold mischief in bringing it forward ; for in the first place it might injure himself, and in the second Mrs. Sherbourne. The remedy for this embarrassing doubt was, however, obvious. His newly formed alliance with Mr. Marchmont was of a kind that fully justified his applying to him for his judgment, and accordingly he immediately directed his steps towards Long-street.

His name had already been given to the little female Cerberus, who opened the street-door, as one of the elect permitted to mount to the region of undying fame, as those favourably reviewed

in *The Regenerator* were wont to style the second floor inhabited by its editor. Charles therefore climbed the stairs unchecked, and rejoiced as he did so at the increase of consequence and confidence which he felt swelling at his heart.

His knock was answered by a rather surly "Come in!" the reason for which might be that Mr. Marchmont was still at breakfast, and moreover not breakfasting alone. The editor himself was seated in the same very easy but very dirty arm-chair in which he had seen him before; but his dress was different, for he now wore a dim-coloured cotton dressing-gown, a flannel waistcoat, no cravat, and the rest of his garments betokening greater attention to his own ease than observance to his companion. This companion was a young and rather pretty woman, who, at the moment of Chesterfield's entrance, was on her knees before the fire in the act of toasting a slice of bacon on a fork.

"What the devil makes you come so early, sir?" said Mr. Marchmont, in a tone that did not express any very peculiar satisfaction at seeing him.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, sir," said Charles, in great confusion; "but I knew not that your breakfast-hour was so late. Give me leave to go, and I will return again at any hour you will name."

"You may stay where you are now, Mr. Chesterfield. It is no great consequence your catching me in this way, if you really mean to stick to the oar. I can't always promise, you know, to be full dressed, or point device in any way when you run in and out upon business. But of course you know that between gentlemen it is a point of honour, where a lady is concerned, never to mention having seen her. You understand this sort of thing of course?"

On this point, however, Mr. Marchmont never was more mistaken in his life. Charles did not understand "this sort of thing" the least in the world, but implicit obedience did quite as well as "the point of honour," and he replied very earnestly, that of course he should never do any thing which Mr. Marchmont desired him not to do.

"Very well; that is all that's necessary. I desire you not to say that you have seen a petticoat breakfasting with me;—and now your business? Have you finished your story already? If you have, you make quick work of it, young sir."

"Not quite, sir," replied Charles. "There is something else that I wish to ask your opinion upon—and it is this which occasions my visit."

"That won't do, sir; upon my soul I can have nothing to do with you on these terms. When I settle with one of my regular

contributors that one sort of thing is to be sent in, it is totally out of the question that I should receive another."

"Of course, sir, of course, I did not mean that. I should never, on any account, think of taking such a liberty. But I was asked to do something last night, and I hope you won't disapprove my consenting, but will have the goodness to give me your opinion of what I have written."

Charles then proceeded to relate his having had the honour of being introduced to Mrs. Sherbourne at Sir George Meddows's house, and all the flattering circumstances which had followed.

"I am persuaded that fellow fancies I want to marry his daughter," said Mr. Marchmont, knitting his brows with an expression of considerable displeasure; "my good friend Mrs. Gibson has never yet got me an invitation to their parties—and there must be some reason for it. As to Mrs. Sherbourne, she will of course have to knuckle to me, like the rest of them, if she expects to do any thing. What is she to give you for this prologue?"

"Give me?" repeated Charles, laughing. "Oh! nothing. It never came into my head for a moment that I was to be paid for it. I shall be quite contented if she will let me go to a rehearsal."

"There you are wrong, sir, very wrong, indeed. Depend upon it, no one ever succeeded in obtaining a literary reputation by *giving* his compositions;—not to mention the great injury you do to others. I positively can continue no literary connection with you whatever, unless you pledge your word to me never to be guilty of this folly again—every thing you write must have a price put upon it."

Terrified beyond measure at the idea of having thus hazarded all his dearest hopes by a piece of such very idle civility, Charles apologized with quite sufficient humility for his blunder, and gave the promise demanded without scruple or reservation. Having done so, however, he ventured to add,

"For the future, sir, I will give you no such cause of complaint; but of course I cannot revoke the promise I made last night; will you, therefore, have the kindness to tell me whether you think these lines will answer the purpose?"

Mr. Marchmont took the offered paper from the trembling hand of Charles; but before he opened it, he silently held out his tea-cup, which was about half full, to the sickly young woman, who had not ceased, from the time Charles entered the room, to pursue with very strenuous attention a variety of operations, all having one and the same object—namely, the breakfast of Mr. Marchmont. She had toasted bacon, she had boiled an egg, she had put water in the tea-pot, and coals upon the fire; but though there was a second tea-cup on the rusty little black tray, and a

second plate on the dirty table-cloth, she had given no indication of intending to use either.

The silent demand of Mr. Marchmont's tea-cup was complied with as quietly as it was made, the young woman taking a black bottle from its bookish retreat, and filling the cup to its brim with the contents of it.

"There, there, that will do. Don't you hear that tiresome brat of yours squalling? go and quiet it for mercy's sake. I shall go perfectly distracted if I am to sit here listening to that infernal noise," said the master of the apartment, in a tone likely enough to make the pale girl he addressed remember that he was so.

She wasted no time in reply, but, hastily replacing the bottle, hurried out of the room without speaking a word.

"Now then, young man, let us see what you have been about," and having swallowed the contents of his tea-cup, Mr. Marchmont rolled his dingy wrapper round him, curled himself up in his arm-chair, and caused the very marrow in poor Charles's bones to quiver under the sternly-critical look which his features assumed.

The composition was not a long one, nor did it take long to read, though the trembling author seemed to die a thousand deaths in the interval.

If the eye of Marchmont appeared to pass over his lines rapidly, a sickly faintness seized upon his heart, from the conviction that they were already condemned. If he paused as he read, a cold shivering crept through his veins, from feeling assured that the bright spirit of his illustrious critic was already weary of him. At any rate, however, his suspense did not last longer than the time employed in the reading; for having reached the last line, Mr. Marchmont, laying the paper upon the table, and placing his arm upon it, said, "It won't do at all, sir. It is quite out of the question, I assure you. If you mean, as you say, to redeem your promise, you must alter these lines altogether. And now, Mr. Chesterfield, I think it may be as well, once for all, to give you a few leading hints upon the present state of literature among us. Are you willing to give me your attention?"

Chesterfield replied, and most truly, that every word he should utter would be treasured in his memory, and valued as the greatest favour that could be bestowed on him.

"Well, then, sir, I am willing to take the trouble of speaking to you," replied Marchmont, with dignity. "To me, sir, it appears perfectly evident that you have received that most disqualifying of all gifts, a learned education. I lament it. I lament it for your sake, I lament it for my own. It is a heavy business, Mr. Chesterfield, to have to unlearn. Acquirements, comparatively speaking, are easily made, but far different is the mental opera-

tion of cleansing the mind from rubbish. To pluck from the memory a rooted folly is the very devil, sir, in the way of labour; yet this you must do, or give up the notion of authorship for ever."

"Tell me one thing, Mr. Marchmont, only tell me one thing," said Charles, greatly agitated; "do you believe me capable of getting rid of the destructive errors you mention?"

"Why, yes, my dear sir, if there be sufficient intensity in your nature, I think this recovery may be hoped for. I have seen it performed on others, and why, therefore, should I not hope for it from you? Fortunately, Mr. Chesterfield, though there is very much to forget, there is but little to remember. Nothing can exceed the beautiful simplicity of the system by which all the greatest celebrities of the day are acquired. Instead of the infinitely complex varieties of style by which the literature of the world has been hitherto disgraced, all now resolves itself into two great elements, the transcendental and the burlesque. There is something vastly magnificent in the broad unbroken line of this division. The genius of man rolls on unchecked, as heretofore, by the paralyzing considerations of the style demanded by such or such a theme; or, viler still, by submitting to the slavery of remembering how some former celebrity, dead and rotten for ages and ages past, has treated it. Merciful sweet Heaven! What can it signify to us how those that are gone may have thought, felt, reasoned, or decided? Do we write for them? Are the depths sublime of human passion, or of human crime, to be explained now as they were explained by our feeble ancestors of old? The intensity, the intellectual intensity of only a hundred years ago, was, to the intellectual intensity of to-day, as the poor housewife's wheel to the steam-engine; and as well, my dear sir, may you hope to succeed by forming your compositions on such models as our drivelling forefathers have left us, as of making a fortune by setting up a distaff in opposition to a spinning-jenny! The simile is a glorious one, and I must work it out hereafter. Do you understand me, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"This magnificent view of the progress of the human understanding is so new to me, Mr. Marchmont," replied Charles, colouring, "that I fear it will take some time before I can fully comprehend it. But let me entreat you to be patient with me. So ardent is my desire to adopt your enlarged views, and master the mystery of your splendid theory, that I cannot but hope I shall succeed at least."

"No doubt of it, young man. The thing is by no means so difficult as it may at first appear. The two grand divisions I have mentioned comprehend the whole intellectual world; there is nothing which may not be classed either in the one or the other:

and woe betide the weakling who should attempt to achieve literary renown by what can belong to neither."

"May I ask you, sir, as a sort of practical lesson," said Charles, modestly, "to show me a specimen of what you conceive to be excellent in each?"

"The request is a rational one, and shall be complied with," replied the mighty master, "though at the cost of very profitable time. If the lesson profits you, Chesterfield, you shall repay me for it hereafter." This was uttered with a very friendly nod, and an accent of such kind familiarity, that the sinking courage of Charles revived within him, and once more feeling his foot firmly planted on the ladder of fame, he listened with ever-increasing interest to the words of his friend.

"To be *practically* useful, as you well express it, Chesterfield, I must, I fear, steal from my labouring hours sufficient time to give you short specimens of each, both in prose and verse. The lines you have yourself brought me this morning may, I am happy to say, with a little, a very little alteration, serve extremely well as a pretty fair specimen of the one genus, and a sonnet which I composed yesterday for the forthcoming number of *The Regenerator*, may do for the other."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Charles, in a perfect ecstasy of joy. "Is it possible that *any* alteration can render what you have just read available?"

"Most assuredly. I will make the alteration myself, and then read the lines aloud to you. I could not devise a better lesson. Have the kindness to mix a little brandy-and-water for me while I make the alteration, will you? You know where to find the needful, and there is more hot water than you will want in the tea-kettle."

Charles readily undertook to perform the office again assigned him, and, as he did so, marked with astonishment the rapid pen of the master going from line to line with a touch which seemed to resemble that of the enchanter's wand, till almost before he had given the final stir to the mixture he was preparing, Mr. Marchmont had completed his task, and, casting his eye over the stanzas, exclaimed, "Very good—very good indeed. Nothing can go better than these lines now do. It is quite wonderful to see what may be done by rigidly adhering to a first principle. You shall hear my lines first, Chesterfield, and then I will read yours. I'll tell you what, my dear fellow," added the critic, tasting the beverage he had just received from the hands of Charles, "if you improve in verse-making as rapidly as in grog-brewing, you will speedily become the first poet of the age. It is capital, I can tell you. Now then for my sonnet. Observe the nature of the sub-

ject, Chesterfield, and the structure of the verse, and whenever you take a theme of the same order, endeavour to follow it. One more sip, my dear brewer, and now for it.

SONNET

ON THE NOTHINGNESS OF ALL THINGS.

How vainly dotards urge the poor pretence,
 That the oft-mooted "Is there aught or nought?"
 May be resolved by evidence of sense!
 Poor shallow souls! whose puny minds are caught
 By empty sophistries of sight and touch!
 Such false realities, such lying truth,
 With all their show of somethingness, are such
 As cozen none who've pass'd their greenest youth.
 Almighty nothing! sublimated thought,
 Gazing at thee with upturn'd eagle eye,
 Forms the sole test whereby the wise are taught
 To recognise thy vast vacuity.
 For think of thought! Ay, strip our thinkings bare;
 Lo, mighty nothing! nought but thou art there.

Having pronounced these lines, Mr. Marchmont remained silent, looking earnestly in the face of Charles as if to discover what he thought of them. But this was not easy, for though Charles Chesterfield, generally speaking, had one of the most ingenuous countenances in the world, his features had now a sort of suspended expression, as far as possible from being satisfactory; for he looked not only as if he did not understand a single syllable of what he had heard, but as if he were waiting in expectation of the explanation which was to follow it. The truth of the case was that poor Charles found himself utterly at a loss to decide for which of the two divisions of all modern literature, the lines he had just heard were intended.

He remembered his own composition, and though he was far from thinking it could merit being designated as transcendental, he had still greater difficulty in believing that it could be classed as a burlesque; so that after a few minutes of very harassing conjecture, he came to the conclusion, that Mr. Marchmont's lines were intended to be jocose. Having thus at length made up his mind upon the point, he endeavoured to smile, and look gay; but he did not succeed well, for, somehow or other, though repeating again and again to himself that they must be comic, his assurance was not of that reasonable kind which is calculated to make a timid man easy, and after two or three ineffectual attempts to declare that he enjoyed the fun exceedingly, he thought better of it, and only said that he should like very much to hear them all over again, they were so very original.

"Quite right, sir," replied Mr. Marchmont, appearing perfectly satisfied with the phrase, "original is precisely what I intended

they should be. It is a fair specimen of that pretty mode of catching and playing with an idea, which is perhaps the last, best gift of high philosophy."

"Good," thought Charles. "I knew I must be right. *Playing with an idea*. Oh! it is certainly exceedingly droll—very comic indeed," he murmured inaudibly, but with great inward satisfaction.

"One of these days, however, you will have a copy of them in print, and then you will be able to study them as I think they deserve. I have no time to repeat them again now, for I am anxious, my good fellow, that you should pay attention to the manner in which I have contrived to bring your lines within reach of being classed under one of the great categories into which, as I have told you, all modern literature is at present divided. You remember your lines, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"Oh yes, sir, perfectly well," replied the blushing poet.

"Now then, mark, as I read them to you.

PROLOGUE

INTENDED TO BE SPOKEN IN CHARACTER AT THE FIRST REPRESENTATION OF MRS. SHERBOURNE'S PLAY, BY A SERVANT OUT OF PLACE.

'Igh are our 'opes for our fair bard to-night!

Ve need no vitty vords your grace to vin;

The critic's venom'd lash must needs fall light,

Vhen vomen to avake their lyres begin!

Vhy did the gods vill the immortal Nine

To vear a wirgin form, a wirgin face?

Vhy to each warious muse of werse divine

Assign a voman's name, a voman's grace?

For this it vas—lest all the 'eavenly throng,

In jealous wengeance of such power supreme,

Should vage fell var against the gods of song,

And poison 'Elicon's delicious stream.

But men and gods alike grant voman's sway,

Nor blush to hown they are by 'er houldone;

Thus manly critics vill happlaud hour play,

And freely yield the palm by voman von."

Having finished the perusal of these lines, which he delivered with a great deal of pointed humour, giving to each *v* and *w* an emphasis which wonderfully increased their value and effect, Mr. Marchmont gave way to a hearty burst of laughter.

"It is irresistible! Perfectly irresistible, upon my soul! I had no idea it would go so well. Are you not yourself astonished at the effect of it, Chesterfield?"

Charles heaved a very deep-drawn sigh, but again endeavoured to smile a little the moment after, in order to place himself in better accordance with his "mighty master;" but it would not do. The iron had entered into his very soul! The lines by which

he had hoped to propitiate the friendship of Mrs. Sherbourne were, it was plain, so irresistibly absurd, that not even the grave and high-toned philosophy of Mr. Marchmont could withstand their ludicrous effect! *Why* he had read them in the peculiar manner he had done, was to him a mystery past finding out, for never having been in London before, and not having as yet enjoyed any opportunity of listening to the colloquial peculiarities of the lower orders, Charles was totally unaware of the clever but simple *tour de force* by which his lines had been converted into the very perfection of risible comedy. But the more he felt how utterly ignorant he was of all the potent mysteries of the noble art to which he had devoted himself, the more he felt the absolute necessity of yielding his mind without a struggle into the hands of the powerful instructor he had so providentially met with; whose influence in the world of letters was as great as his genius, and whose kindness to him seemed, if possible, to exceed both. He remembered the manner in which the young men of Greece were wont to hang on the eloquent lips of the sages who instructed them.

"They challenged not," thought Charles, "the wisdom of the lore they sought to acquire, neither will I. And where is the wonder that one bred, as I have been, in a retirement so profound as to shut out the knowledge of all that was passing amidst living men, should have acquired only such learning as may have been bequeathed to us from the dead? It is evident that I must choose, and choose at once, between two things. I must either lay down the old-world learning of which we have made our boast amidst the secluded shades of Charlton, and give myself, heart and soul, to the strangely dazzling literature of the day, or at once abandon all hope of name and fame, and return to bury myself anew in the farm-house at Maplebury. My choice is made! I give myself, heart and soul, to the age in which I live."

"Mr. Marchmont!" said Charles, addressing his elected tutor, who, during the short interval of the young man's rumination had amused himself by running his eye anew over the lines he had so admirably turned from dull to droll,—*"Mr. Marchmont! Nothing but my very earnest wish for the information which you, of all men, are most able to give, could inspire me with courage to confess that I do not comprehend the classification of which you have been speaking, nor—forgive me—the style and manner in which you have been reading the stupid lines I gave you."*

"Stupid! Be satisfied, Chesterfield, when I tell you that they are admirable," replied Mr. Marchmont, gravely.

"You are very kind, sir," said Charles, with desperate courage,

“ but if they are, it is in a way that I do not understand. I did not mean to make them so very droll as you seem to think them.”

“ Exactly so. I know it perfectly ; and herein consists the strength of that vast modern engine by which almost any imaginable composition may be made fit for profitable use. It will probably be some time before you will fully comprehend the principles I am endeavouring to teach you ; but fortunately for both of us, Chesterfield, the practice may be adopted even before the principles are caught. For instance. Your prologue, in the state you gave it to me, could have produced no possible effect, except setting the good people to sleep before their time, which would not have been fair, you know, to Mrs. Sherbourne. But if distinctly delivered as I have left it, having merely transposed every *v* and *w* throughout the four stanzas, and managed the aspirates according to the laws of modern wit, the effect, as you will see, will be electrical. Nobody can stand it. The young, the old, the grave, the gay, all yield together to the mysterious *spell* (forgive the pun) produced by this mode of writing. Yet it is a very simple operation. But it may perhaps be necessary for you repeatedly to note the fact, before you can be able to conceive it. That it is so, however, is as certain as that the round globe, we call the sun, produces light and heat. So, on the other hand, there be many thoughts which Goodman Dull, the parish-parson, perhaps might pronounce to be mere midsummer madness, concocted when the moon was at the full. And yet, Chesterfield, these noble rhapsodies in which the mind is now permitted to wander unrestrained through the mystic ether of imagination, are productive of a genus of compositions as sublime as they are new. Milton knew nothing about it,—absolutely nothing. His great poem, as it used to be called, if just read straight on, as ordinary prose, would sound little better than Jack the Giant-killer, to persons accustomed to the intensity of sentiment and passion brought forward in the transcendental compositions of our own time. When once you become familiarly acquainted with these, and with the best specimens of our great burlesque school, you may consider your education, as an author, complete. I have already ascertained that you have some command of words—and this, excepting pen, ink, and paper, is the only *matériel* essentially necessary to ensure success. Thought lends itself so easily to the present style of writing, that all difficulty on that score is completely removed. And now I think I have said enough for the present. I will give you some specimens to study, before we meet again, which cannot fail of being useful to you. Here they are,” he added, opening his desk and taking from it two small packets, contain-

ing a sheet or two each. "They are both so highly finished, and so excellent in their way, that I keep them back purposely a little, to bring up the tone of any number less brilliantly excellent than I might wish."

"May I ask the names of their authors, sir?" said Charles, hesitating.

"They are both from my own pen," replied Mr. Marchmont.

"You are a wonderful man, sir!" exclaimed the youthful tyro, in a burst of irrepressible admiration. "Equally great in all ways!"

"I don't know about that, my dear fellow," answered the master, modestly. "But in point of fact, Chesterfield, it is most indisputably certain, that without considerable versatility of talent, no man could hold the situation of editor of *The Regenerator*."

"That is indeed, sir, a truth too obvious to be controverted. But alas! Mr. Marchmont, I tremble before the conscious deficiency of my own powers, even as a contributor—at least for some time to come. Shall I confess to you, that even now I do not well understand the reason of your altering the spelling of my lines. Why does every body enjoy it so much?"

"Is it possible that you do not yourself taste the exquisite burlesque?" demanded Marchmont, looking at him with genuine astonishment.

"I perceive that the words so pronounced sound very strangely, but they might be made to sound more strangely still, if more letters were changed," observed Charles.

"Egad, that's very true, boy, and I don't know but we might make some use of it—but it must be in a totally different manner. This, you see, is genuine London lingo; the manner, you know, in which the very lowest of the people talk in the streets."

"Is it indeed!" said Charles.

"To be sure it is. Didn't you know that?" returned Mr. Marchmont, in a tone of considerable contempt.

"I had no idea of it, sir. You know I have never been in London before, and as yet I have walked very little in the streets. It seems to me, then," added the young man, musingly, "that this species of composition is intended wholly for London?"

"Nonsense! That's utter nonsense, Chesterfield. The whole world must learn the cockney tongue, if they do not know it already. I tell you once for all, that cockney slang, and cockney pronunciation, is the very essence, the very marrow, the very life and soul of English wit at the present day: and if you don't understand it, you must learn to understand it; and if you don't like it, you must learn to like it; and if you refuse to make use of it, you may just shut up shop and run away."

"I will learn it, I will like it, and I will make use of it," exclaimed Charles, eagerly; "and if I agree to this, Mr. Marchmont," he continued, with some little show of country spirit, "you must not be angry with me if I say, that for the life of me I can't help thinking there is more wit in the Rape of the Lock, now, for instance, than in all the queer spelling in the world."

"A more musty-fusty bit of criticism than that has not been uttered, Chesterfield, I will bet my existence, since the bishops' wigs were thrown into the fire. It smells of Russia leather and vellum, like a college-library; and were I to *début* such a notion in *The Regenerator*, I'll engage to say that my subscribers would fall off three-fourths before the next number."

"Fear nothing from me, my dear sir," returned Charles, earnestly; "I would rather put my hand into the fire than risk any injury to your publication by my countrified notions. I feel already so deeply conscious of the lamentable ignorance in which I have been reared, that, depend upon it, I shall, from very shame, be driven to adopt views more enlightened, and fitter for the age in which we live. But, just at first, the light seems to dawn so suddenly upon me, that I wink like a person newly led from a dark prison."

"Capital! You should not squander such an excellent thought as that in idle talk, Chesterfield. It is enough to beget a whole paper on enlarged views, and anti-musty principles. Now off with you, my fine fellow; I must positively write seven columns and a half before I dine. Let me have your story as soon as it's done; and hark-ye, Chesterfield, when you have read the two articles you have got there, if you should happen to find that your own seems to go flat after them, remember what I have been saying—remember, that if you cannot make it do one way, you may change it to another."

"You may depend upon it, Mr. Marchmont, that I shall never, as long as I remember any thing, forget your instructions of this morning. It will be some time, perhaps, before what is so new can become familiar, but, however little I may understand your principles of composition, my confidence in their value never can be shaken."

"You are a very fine young man, Mr. Chesterfield: you tell me you have confidence in me, and I may very sincerely return the compliment. I have confidence in you; and feel no doubt whatever, that in the course of a year or two, if you persevere steadily in writing for *The Regenerator*, your literary reputation will be spread as far and wide as my own."

Charles seized the hand of his new friend, and pressed it to his heart, but he had no power to speak. The prophecy he had

heard rung in his ears, and rendered him for a minute or two quite incapable of utterance.

“If I do become known,” he said at last, “if in sober earnest I may indeed hope to become one of the great and glorious republic of letters, it will be to you that I shall owe it, and my gratitude shall end but with my life!”

The emotions of the poor youth as he uttered this were equally strong and genuine; Mr. Marchmont returned the pressure of his hand, and seemed to feel a great deal too, and so they parted, neither of them speaking again, but naturally giving a farewell wring to the hand they held, and exchanging a look which said much more about affection and confidence than any words could have done.

“Poor old Westbrook!” murmured Charles, as he turned his steps homeward, “he did for me the best he could! But this man is at once my tutor and my example, my patron and my friend!”

CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. Sherbourne—Charles’s Visit to her—He progresses rapidly.

It has seldom happened that any mind, not absolutely passing from a sane to an insane state, ever underwent a more violent and complete change than that of Charles Chesterfield, in the interval between his arrival in London, and his entering Mrs. Sherbourne’s parlour in Mount-street. The primal cause of this lamentable want of steadfast principle and steadfast taste was the restless, gnawing, insatiable vanity which had disturbed him, even when reading his verses to Bessy on the turf-bank in Maplebury orchard. Her ardent admiration of every thing he did delighted but could not satisfy him; nay, on the contrary, it only nourished the flame that consumed him.

“If this dear girl, unenlightened as she is, feels thus vividly the beauty of these thoughts, and the charm of their expression, what might I not hope for, had I the means of making them known to the world!”

Such was the thought that first fixed his waking faculties in the morning, and weighed the last upon his heart when sleep came to change the bootless hopes and idle wishes of the day into the feverish dreams and glorious visions of the night.

This inordinate passion—this strong yet sickly vanity, had almost stifled all the best affections of his nature, while he remained in the country; and when he arrived in town, that longed-for goal of his fantastic hopes, the seemingly near approach of all that he most coveted on earth nearly made him an idiot. Such was the unmeasured dignity which he attached

to London celebrity, that the looking upon Marchmont, after being assured that he possessed it, was like gazing upon the incarnation of the highest glory to which man could attain on earth. No wonder then, that in such a state of mind he was contented to crawl submissively in his train, intoxicated, entranced, and bewildered, by the belief that by doing so, he too might become

“A thing to wonder at—perhaps a——”

filling up the hiatus with one name or another, as the manner of the multitude dictated, or the advertising judgment of the newspapers ordained.

The most injurious step, perhaps, in the whole process which thus confounded the poor lad's intellect, was that by which he gained the point from whence he ceased to contemplate his former tutor with reverence. From that time his judgment became so utterly lost and bewildered, as to leave him precisely in the condition of a very frail little vessel, without any rudder at all.

But to return. From the house of Mr. Marchmont Charles immediately returned to his lodgings, carefully copied his prologue with its emendations, and then proceeded to that of Mrs. Sherbourne, whom he found precisely as he could have wished; that is to say, alone, and with all her thoughts concentrated on the subject on which he came to speak.

Those who are familiar, personally, with the authorial world of London, must know, or have known, more than one person in many points exceedingly like Mrs. Sherbourne. She was, beyond all doubt, past her first youth, but she was in the fullest meridian of her second. A period, it may be observed, infinitely more thought of and cared for by the fair possessor than the first, which in most cases is pretty much permitted to take care of itself, without any very active attempts to improve upon nature. Not so with the period which we venture to denominate the second; and it may be that the consciousness felt by beauties in their second stage of bloom, of their charms being in a great degree the result of their own ingenious industry, may be one reason for the increased value they set upon them. At any rate, Mrs. Sherbourne did very dearly value all the beauty she had left, and certainly watched over it with quite as much care as any mother could do over her child. It has been before stated that she was exceedingly small; but if at any moment of her existence she might have felt a pang at passing almost unseen, when some noble Juno, or firm-stepping Diana, with their graceful length of limb, drew all eyes upon them, she felt it amply atoned for, when she contemplated her own tiny foot and fairy hand. Her hair too, which was somewhat of the auburn tint, curled naturally; her complexion, though rather sallow, was sufficiently colourless

to give her hands, arms, neck, and shoulders, the reputation of being very fair, and their renown on this account ran no danger of being lost or forgotten, by their retirement from public observation. Her eyes were very large, and, though extremely light, understood well the mysterious tactics of the exercise to which they were drilled, often speaking unutterable things with most eloquent expression. Her nose, notwithstanding the sublimity of her genius, was a little approaching to the pug; her mouth was wide, her teeth beautiful, and she enjoyed the advantage of an ever ready and pretty dimple. Such was the person of Mrs. Sherbourne. To describe her mind as accurately would be more difficult. She certainly was not without talent—far from it; but it was of a flimsy, loose, and unstable quality. No one was more ready to pronounce an opinion, yet there was probably no subject under Heaven, except her own beauty, and that of all the young men of her acquaintance, on which she really had one.

This, as she talked a vast deal (except when engaged in one of those sentimental flirtations which are carried on entirely by means of byplay and a silence so remarkable as to attract every body's attention)—as, excepting on these occasions, she was a great talker, the total want of fixed opinions, all must have involved her in many self-contradictions, had not her infinite skill in subterfuge and prevarication prevented it.

So habitual to her was the necessity of thus dipping, as it were, under the deep waters of her own uncertainty, in order to avoid being caught in the fact of exactly contradicting herself, that she never spoke with peculiar warmth and eloquence, without preparing a retreat from every word she uttered. Sometimes she broke down all matter-of-fact remarks, by an outbreak of playful childishness, in which her teeth and her dimple did her infinite service. Sometimes she melted away into generalities; and sometimes condensed herself into a well-told little anecdote, perfectly foreign to the subject. If the theme were earthly, positive, and inconveniently bearing upon facts, she darted gracefully aloft like a skylark, and twittered away in the region of metaphysics. Was it criticism, and did she chance to blunder grossly, from the accident of never having read a line of the work under discussion, she saved herself by setting off upon a sort of catch-me-who-can gallop, over verse and across prose, through history and under common sense, till she had completely distanced the slow-paced march of truth and reason, and turned ready to back upon her pursuers, perfectly unwearied, wholly unscathed, and quite ready to set off again.

For the success of her works, on which she almost entirely depended for her existence, she trusted to what she called the

intensity of her own feelings. Nor did she trust in vain. No circulating library from the Orkneys to the Land's End dared to confess that they had not got Mrs. Sherbourne's last work; and "The Condemned One"—"The Entranced One"—"The Corrupted One"—"The Infernal One"—"The Empyrean One"—and "The Disgusting One," all in succession conveyed her intensity into every village of the empire, and brought in return wherewithal to "live and love, to dress and dream" (which in one of her "Occasional Poems" she had declared ought to be the whole of woman's existence), very much to her satisfaction. Whether she or her publisher got tired first, it is not necessary to inquire; but having, as she often said with her deepest dimple, thrown off many, she was determined not to throw off *one* more, lest she should throw it away; and of late she had devoted herself wholly to poetry, having already published "Songs of Love and Lays of Laziness," "Songs of Sound and Songs of Sense," besides a little volume on "Withering Leaves and Opening Buds." She was now, as we have seen, concentrating all her strength upon a drama, which a very particular friend of hers had undertaken to get acted, through the interest of a manager with whom he was exceedingly intimate.

The morning-dress of Mrs. Sherbourne never varied, at least as to its style. Summer and winter she was always *décolletée*, and summer and winter she was always enveloped, more or less, in a black cashmere shawl. She was usually placed on a sofa with a small table and writing-desk before her, and a very inviting arm-chair immediately opposite; nevertheless, Mrs. Sherbourne's morning visitors sometimes sat beside her on the sofa, and sometimes the examination of a new-born poem was permitted to be carried on over her shoulder, and sometimes by her side. But this, of course, was only among her particular friends; those less familiar being always established in the arm-chair.

That Mrs. Sherbourne, who had been seven years a widow, had made no second marriage, must, in all civility, be received as proof that she preferred a single life; and that she was very much the fashion among a certain set, and received without scruple by ladies of the highest respectability, must be held as equally conclusive of the perfect discretion of her conduct, notwithstanding her constant and avowed habit of receiving visits from all sorts of gentlemen, at almost all sorts of hours. But, as she was wont to observe, her professional existence depended upon her welcoming, without reserve, all those who could assist her in her pursuits, either by criticism or patronage—a truth too obvious to be controverted by any one. Her existence, therefore, glided on through a series of small literary labours, cheered by a series, equally unbroken, of small literary flirtations, each

helping forward the other by a reciprocity of influence, by no means unskillfully managed. Whenever she particularly dreaded a writer of biting paragraphs, she managed to get introduced to him, and rarely failed, however fierce his nature, to calm the terrors of his pen, as far as herself was concerned, by that gentle tone of independent weakness, which, as long as a white hand remains to flourish a pocket-handkerchief, and expressive eyes to drop their liquid pearls upon it, can hardly fail to soften the most flinty heart. While, on the other hand, whenever she wished to produce an effect, and display herself as the centre of a circle, she understood perfectly well how to make common cause between her books and her beauty, without ever permitting the one to outshine the other.

The moment Charles entered the room, she remembered that Mrs. Gibson announced him as one of the most promising young authors of the day; she remembered also that he had undertaken to write her a prologue gratis; moreover she did not forget that she thought him very handsome; so that altogether he could not fail of being satisfied with his reception, or of feeling a delightful assurance that he was advancing rapidly towards fame, and all the pleasures as well as all the glories that it brings.

“I have waited upon you, Mrs. Sherbourne,” he said, “in order to submit to your inspection the lines I have scribbled for your prologue. I would not, however, take the liberty of offering them to your notice till I had sought the judgment of Mr. Marchmont upon them. I need hardly ask you if you know his name?”

“O Heavens! no! *The Regenerator!*” replied Mrs. Sherbourne. “The man of all others to whom I am most anxious to be presented! My wanderings amidst the

“Fier, frondi, erbe, ombre, antri, onde, aure,”

of *la bella poese*, have kept me hitherto from making any personal acquaintance with him, but of his reputation and his influence who can be ignorant? How can I thank you, dear, dear Mr. Chesterfield? How can I be sufficiently grateful for your excessive kindness? So soon to have completed your benevolent task, and with such admirable tact to have submitted it at once to *The Regenerator*, deserves more gratitude than I have words to express, but not more than I have power to feel!” And here Mrs. Sherbourne, quite overwhelmed by her feelings, sought her pocket-handkerchief with a hasty action, intending to conceal her emotion; but it concealed nothing; the hurried movement, on the contrary, disturbed the position of her shawl, and displayed a white shoulder, with a long brown ringlet falling down, as if on purpose to touch it. She really looked as attractive as it was possible she could look.

“How very pretty she is!” thought Charles; and the opinion could do no discredit to his taste, inasmuch as it was precisely the same as almost all gentlemen formed on witnessing the same action, the same result.

After a moment given to the touching her eyes, and replacing her shawl (that most troublesome of all draperies), Mrs. Sherbourne resumed: “Let me then see what you have done. You have no idea how I long for it!”

Charles drew out the paper, but, ere he put it in her hands, he asked whether her absence from England had been sufficiently long to prevent her becoming acquainted with the recent division of modern literature into two classes.

The lady looked a little puzzled.

“What classes, Mr. Chesterfield?—I do not quite comprehend you,” she said.

“I mean the transcendental and the ludicrous,” he replied, while his heart fluttered pleasantly in his bosom at finding himself soon becoming an instructor, and the instructor, too, of so very charming a person. “All compositions, as my admirable friend Mr. Marchmont tells me, are now ranged under one or other of these two heads, and no success can be hoped for from productions which belong to neither. Are you not aware of this, my dear madam?”

“Oh dear, yes! perfectly. I did not exactly catch your meaning at first; but tell your gifted friend from me, I beseech you, that I honour the boldness of his definition, and hold myself bound to submit to the rule,” replied Mrs. Sherbourne, giving her troublesome shawl another ineffectual pull, for it positively would not come above the left shoulder. “Alas for me!” she continued, “nature has classed me already, and that too rigorously, I believe, even to permit my wavering. It is not my style, Mr. Chesterfield—not my style only, that places me, of necessity, I may say, amidst transcendental writers. With intensity of feeling such as mine, I am doomed, for ever doomed, to be such or nothing!”

“And would you wish it otherwise, dearest lady?” cried Charles, with enthusiasm. “Among such only can we hope to find the highest order of greatness. I protest to you,” he continued, while a sort of mystical rapture expanded his countenance, “I protest to you, Mrs. Sherbourne, that there is something in Mr. Marchmont’s manner of expressing himself, as well as in his manner of thinking, when taking flight into the higher region of intellectual existence, which affects me in a manner that I cannot describe.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the lady, clasping her hands, and gazing at

him with what she would herself have called "fevered interest," "I catch your feeling! You are entranced and borne along.—You are roused, elevated, touched, and overwhelmed! Yet happy, exquisitely happy, amidst the fine mental tumult! Is it not so, Mr. Chesterfield? Tell me!" and she laid her little hand upon his arm, "tell me! Do I not harp your feelings rightly?"

"Oh! yes, I believe," returned Charles, colouring a little. "But I really hardly know what I felt. All that seems perfectly clear and intelligible to me is, that Mr. Marchmont is one of the most extraordinary men that ever lived!"

"Every hour is lost in which I do not know him!" cried Mrs. Sherbourne. "Oh! tell him! will you tell him, Mr. Chesterfield, what my feelings are towards him? Do this skilfully, and you will serve both yourself and me," she added, with more of truth and less of flourish than she had yet spoken. "For of course you may give him to understand that the intensity of the impulse which draws me towards him, is in a great degree derived from your description of his extraordinary powers. You are younger than I am!" and her large pale eyes seemed almost to melt under the gentle sadness with which she owned this *not* soft impeachment, "younger in the world of letters, younger in all ways, and I do you service, and in some degree return the kindness you have shown me, by impressing upon you the immense importance of propitiating the favour of Mr. Marchmont."

"So Mrs. Gibson told me," replied Charles, looking as if he thought both ladies meant rather more than he perfectly comprehended. "Of course you mean that to so young an author as myself, his instructions and advice are invaluable?"

"Oh! of course," replied Mrs. Sherbourne, but in an accent which convinced her companion that she meant something else besides.

"It will be very kind, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, if you will explain yourself fully," said Charles, fixing his anxious eyes so earnestly on hers that she dropped them from the mere force of habit. "I beg your pardon," he added, with some little embarrassment, "if I have asked you to say more than you like."

"No, no, do not think it!" returned Mrs. Sherbourne, once more laying her hand kindly on his arm, and quite persuaded that a part at least of the young man's earnestness of manner in making this appeal arose from a natural wish to be on more confidential acquaintance. "Our interests are so much the same, dear Mr. Chesterfield, as to render reserve unnecessary—indeed to me such restraint would be most unnatural when conversing with such a one as yourself. I do not, I cannot, fear either treachery or indiscretion from you, and, therefore, I will

speaking with perfect frankness. Admirable as you say Mr. Marchmont's talents are—and I am sure I have no doubt in the world of it, which is a fact that I exceedingly desire that he should know, Mr. Chesterfield—remember that, will you? Admirable as he is, that is not the only reason why you and I should be desirous of standing well with him. *The Regenerator* has a very extensive sale, and its influence upon circulating libraries is prodigious. Are you aware of this?"

Charles again felt puzzled, yet he was getting on very rapidly, and was already grown too wise to look as bewildered as he felt.

"I dare say it is," he replied.

"Enormous!" resumed Mrs. Sherbourne. "I am assured that in the great manufacturing towns, where there is a most important mass of middle-class and lower-class readers, *The Regenerator* can make the difference between one copy or two."

"Really!" said Charles.

"It is no exaggeration, I assure you; and just conceive what that must be! People talk of the *great* reviews, as they call them, as if they were of the utmost importance to the writing world. There are, I believe, particularly in London, a set of people who hardly read any thing else; that is quite true: but, trust me, my dear sir, their influence upon the writers of the day—the popular writers I mean—not the great heavy guns that are fired off about once in a dozen years—but upon what may properly be called *popular* writers,—upon these their influence, compared to that of such a publication as *The Regenerator*, is absolutely nothing. And this fact should never be lost sight of by authors."

"I understand perfectly," said Charles. "You mean that *The Regenerator* is so much more read than those great reviews, as you call them, that their praise or blame of a new book cannot be spread so widely?"

"Not among circulating libraries, certainly. But that is not all, you know; very far from it. The great secret lies in knowing how *The Regenerator*, and all the papers of the same stamp, are carried on—particularly in the critical department. You write for it, Mrs. Gibson tells me, and therefore," added Mrs. Sherbourne, laughing, and playfully holding up her finger within an inch of his nose, "I need not explain the mystery of the ready-made part of the concern."

Charles said nothing in reply, and certainly looked more meditative than lively. "Foolish boy! How easily he might have kissed my hand!" thought Mrs. Sherbourne; and at the same time a feeling of caution seized upon her, and she determined upon not being too confidential. Changing her tone, therefore, she said, "But how idly am I gossiping instead of seizing upon

the precious aid you bring me. Now, then, let me see my prologue, dear Mr. Chesterfield?"

"I greatly doubt," he replied, colouring up to the very tips of his ears, "I greatly doubt, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, whether you will approve what I have brought you. In speaking of Mr. Marchmont we have alluded only to his sublime compositions; are you aware that he himself occasionally indulges in the burlesque, and that he thinks very highly of the effect to be obtained on the public mind by the present ludicrous mode of composition?"

"Of course, I am aware of it,—who is not? This is an age of epochs, Mr. Chesterfield, and the introduction of this new school of wit forms one of them. Is your prologue written upon this tone?"

"It is," replied Charles, rather solemnly.

"I am delighted to hear it! Nothing is so likely to put the audience in good humour! How very judicious, and how very kind!" said Mrs. Sherbourne, with very genuine delight.

Thus encouraged, Charles, with a tolerably steady hand, presented the manuscript to her.

"Will you read it to me?" said she.

"I would rather you looked at it first yourself," he replied.

Without further delay Mrs. Sherbourne opened the paper, and read, "*By a servant out of place.*" Excellent! A most happy idea indeed!" She then proceeded with a rapid eye to peruse the verses, and, to poor Charles's inexpressible relief, appeared enchanted with them, bursting again and again into delighted laughter, and ended by clapping her hands, and crying "bravo!" with the most clamorous applause.

"How extraordinarily clever!" she said, more gravely re-perusing the lines. "If you had known me as many years as you have done hours, Mr. Chesterfield, you could not have hit upon any thing so certain of being advantageous to me. Such lines as these would undoubtedly have produced great effect under any circumstances, but preceding a drama of mine, it will be perfectly overpowering. The intensity with which I write is so well known to the public, that this delicious incongruity will be felt as keenly, and enjoyed as heartily, before they have heard or read a line of the play, as if every touching scene was already before them. You shall be with me, dear Chesterfield, at the first representation, and witnessing the success of your lines will be your best reward for having written them."

As she said this she placed her hand in his, with a grace so irresistibly bewitching, that this time he actually did kiss it, being in truth, so intoxicated by his unexpected success as to have courage for any thing. In proof of which he said, as he still held

her hand, "but you won't forget the rehearsal, Mrs. Sherborne? I perfectly long for it."

"Forget it? No, you delightful creature! I shall certainly not forget either that or any thing else I can do to please you. Yes, dear Chesterfield! we will go together to the next rehearsal, and if you like my little drama, you will not refuse, will you—

'Freely to grant the praise by *voman von*.'

Charles made a more suitable answer to this speech than it would have been possible for him to have done twenty-four hours before. To such a temperament as his, there is no inspiration in the world like a little flattery.

"I will write to you then—shall I?" said the lady, "when the day for the next rehearsal is fixed. And we will go together, dear friend."

"A thousand, thousand thanks!" replied the happy Charles.

"But your address, *étourdi*! How am I to write to you without that?" said Mrs. Sherbourne, fixing her eyes upon his, and shaking her head respectfully.

Charles reseated himself, her little hand playfully placed a pen in his large one, and he wrote his name and the address to his lodgings in South Molton-street, giving it to her with a look almost as lingering as her own.

"*Bene, bene*, I shall now know where to find you. Farewell! But do not run away now and forget me!"

Certainly no young man could improve more rapidly than Charles Chesterfield, and nothing could be less alike than his manner of accosting Mrs. Sherbourne on arriving, and that of his taking leave of her, when he departed. The improvement was not lost upon her.

"What an excessively nice creature!" she murmured, as he drew the house-door after him. "I must find time to see him often. It will be a real pleasure to be of use to him, and I know I could improve him amazingly. He is precisely the kind of being that I love to patronize and be kind to."

CHAPTER XVI.

Charles visits Miss Meddows—Cross Purposes—Letters to Country Friends—An unpublished M.S.—A Visit from the "Master."

THE first movement of Charles on leaving Mrs. Sherbourne was to return to Long-street, and express to Marchmont all the gratitude he felt for the great service he had rendered him, but ere he had descended one-third of the way from Mount-street to the region of Golden-square, he recollected what his patron had said respecting the pressure of business which was upon him, and

turning back he determined to seek Miss Meddows, and tell her of the happiness he had that morning enjoyed, from having more than satisfied the celebrated Mrs. Sherbourne by the prologue he had taken to her. It was long past the hour of luncheon, and if he saw Miss Meddows at all, it could only be by asking admission to the little boudoir behind the drawing-rooms, into which she had once shown him the way herself. Nothing could prove more strongly the change which the last ten days had produced on the mind of Charles, than his having conceived such a project; but instead of trembling at the idea, he now enjoyed it extremely, feeling certain of a kind reception, remembering how Clara had left every body to talk to him on the night of her party, and conscious that the news he had to communicate must place him still higher in her good opinion. In short, he determined to make his way to her without ceremony.

Notwithstanding his separate lodging, the young man was sufficiently domesticated in the house to permit of his coming in and going out without any questions asked or answered; and he now therefore walked into the hall, and up the drawing-room stairs, without even inquiring if Miss Meddows was at home. The passage which led to her retreat was approached by a door that opened about half-way up the principal staircase, and had in every way the appearance of leading to a more retired and out-of-the-way part of the mansion than guests are usually admitted to in a London residence. Of this, however, Charles knew nothing, and certainly had no idea that there was any greater impertinence in seeking the young lady there than in the drawing-room. He had, however, sufficient discrimination to knock at the door of the room before he opened it, but his signal being answered by a gentle-sounding "come in," he immediately made his appearance, where he was certainly as little expected as possible.

Had Clara possessed less clearness of perception, the young intruder would have been received with considerably more haughtiness than under the circumstances she thought proper to display. His exclamation of, "Oh, Miss Meddows, I have such good news to tell you!" with the eager happy look that accompanied it, explained to her at once the state of his mind, and altogether disarmed her displeasure at the unauthorized freedom of his approach.

"Have you, Mr. Chesterfield?" she said, with a friendly smile, "and what may it be?"

"I have written a prologue for Mrs. Sherbourne's play, and she thinks it very good and very clever indeed, and says it will do perfectly. And it will certainly be spoken, Miss Meddows, when her play is acted. Will you not be so kind as to go and hear it?"

It was in Clara's nature not to answer such an address with either pride or peevishness, and there was something in the heavy sadness of her own heart which made her feel that happiness ought to be cherished wherever it was seen.

"Indeed, I am very glad of it," she replied, "and if I do not witness its public success, I assure you I shall hear of it with great pleasure."

But having said this, and seeing him place his hand upon the back of a chair, very much as if his next manœuvre would be to place himself in it, she looked a little grave, and remained for a moment with her hand spread upon the book she was reading, meditating on the gentlest manner of telling the young poet that he must be pleased to understand that he was not to pay her any more such unexpected visits for the future. Before this meditative minute was over, she was startled by hearing her father's voice in the passage leading to her door, and still more startled when he opened it, and ushered in Mr. Dalrymple.

As such an occurrence had never happened to her before, it might naturally have produced an emotion, even had she not spent many hours of the morning in vain efforts to ascertain the meaning of the words she read, while heavily reckoning the hours as they passed without bringing the hoped-for announcement that Mr. Dalrymple was in the drawing-room.

His sudden appearance, and in a manner too in which he had never appeared before—for this was the first time he had ever entered her room—completely overset the composure of manner which it was the great study of her life to sustain in her intercourse with him. Her delicate cheeks and even her forehead became crimson; she rose up and sat down again without being conscious that she did either; and, in short, betrayed every symptom of the most violent and embarrassing confusion. Of the presence of Charles she became perfectly unconscious, and even totally forgot for the moment that he had entered the room. Not so Mr. Dalrymple; he could scarcely be said indeed to see any thing else; or to be conscious of any thing but that the young man had been enjoying the privilege of a *tête-à-tête* in a part of the mansion so secure from ordinary interruption, that he now, for the first time, was made acquainted of its existence. In another moment, however, he was conscious of something else too; he was conscious that the cold and haughty Clara was overwhelmed with confusion.

Mr. Dalrymple assuredly was not the first man who has read amiss the heart he was most anxious to study: but never certainly did any of his predecessors in blundering, blunder more egregiously.

There stood the high-minded, the delicate, the reserved Clara, startled out of her self-possession by the unexpected sight of him—of him whom of all the world she most esteemed, revered, admired, and—alas! despite of all her proud struggles—loved; devotedly, passionately, fondly loved; there stood Clara trembling, blushing, faltering from the emotion produced by his presence, forgetful that there was another human being in the room, or in the world—forgetful even of her fair self. And there stood Dalrymple, distilling wretchedness from what, if read aright, would have made him fancy that earth was turned to heaven; there he stood, turning himself to stone by his own hard thoughts, and secretly taking all the gods to witness that never, never would he see that vain, light woman more.

Sir George meanwhile looked about him sharply enough, but all he could make out from what he saw was that Dalrymple looked devilish cross, and Clara confoundedly red. As to Charles, he presumed he was there to perform some behest of his “heiress,” as he not unfrequently called her, particularly before strangers, and having given him a smart slap on the shoulder, accompanied by his usual salutation, “How are ye, my fine fellow?” he thought no more about him.

Having in some degree recovered from the surprise which had caused her to betray a weakness in general so effectually concealed, Clara said,

“Will you not sit down, Mr. Dalrymple? This is a very unusual honour, papa, and I am quite proud of it.”

At the words “unusual honour,” Mr. Dalrymple involuntarily raised his eyes from the ground to young Chesterfield, and had Clara happened to intercept the glance, she might have become enlightened upon more points than one, concerning which she was now in very profound darkness. Had her father encountered it, the metropolitan adventures of Charles Chesterfield would probably have been brought to a very hasty conclusion; for whatever might have been the whim that brought him there, or the calculations which led to his being retained, it is quite certain that had they been of a much more solid composition than they were, they would all have melted into thin air, had the idea suggested itself, that his presence was disagreeable to Mr. Dalrymple.

Clara, however, saw not this speaking look, because, though recovering herself, she was by no means courageous enough as yet to raise her eyes to the face of Mr. Dalrymple; and Sir George saw it not, because he happened to be looking at the name of “Almeria Gibson,” inscribed upon a note which lay open upon the table before him.

“What has that nice girl been writing to you about, Clara?” demanded Sir George, pointing to the despatch.

“She wants me to walk with her in the park this morning,” replied the young lady, rather glad of an opportunity of speaking.

“May I read her note, Clara?” said Sir George, laughing.

Happy also to have something to do, Clara made a step or two towards the place where it lay, and, taking it up, presented it to him. In doing this she passed close to Dalrymple, and unvoluntarily, perhaps, looked up into his face as she retreated again. It would be difficult to define the feeling which the expression of his countenance produced on her; it was terror, astonishment, and tenderness, all in one. He was deadly pale, and his eye spoke anger, disdain, and a degree of misery that almost approached to despair. Her only idea was that he must be suddenly ill.

“You are not well, Mr. Dalrymple?” she exclaimed. “Sit down, I pray you sit down; I am sure you are not well.”

“I beg your pardon, Miss Meddows, I am perfectly well, I assure you,” he replied; “rather harassed, perhaps,” he continued, “by the hurry in which I am preparing to leave town; but, nevertheless, I have found time to make my *congé* to you, though I fear it has been done at the expense of your convenience. Had I known that you were engaged, I would not have permitted your father to lead me hither. I trust you will forgive this very impertinent intrusion, of which I really feel heartily ashamed.”

“I am not at all engaged, Mr. Dalrymple,” said Clara, turning her eyes towards her desk, to see what it might be that had put the idea of her being so very busy into his head; “I was merely reading, and I did not find my book at all entertaining. I do assure you that your visit has not interrupted me at all.”

“Reading, were you?” he replied, drily.

“Yes,” she said, turning over the leaves of the volume, and totally forgetful of the presence of Charles; “I have been reading with great diligence, for I wanted to send the book home. Are you going to be many days absent from London, Mr. Dalrymple?”

Indignant and irritated beyond measure, at a reply that appeared to him as offensive from its mocking falsehood, as hypocritical in its civility, he stood for a moment without returning any answer, and then said,

“Many days? Oh, yes, probably for many weeks. Have the kindness to present my compliments to Mrs. Longuéville. And now I must wish you good morning, for I really have a thousand things to do. Good morning, Sir George.”

“Where the devil are you going to?” said the baronet, allud-

ing however only to his leaving the room, which he was at that moment evidently about to do, for of his suddenly announced project of leaving town he had heard not a word, having been wholly engrossed by the despatch of the fair Almeria. "What makes you in such a confounded hurry, Arthur? I wanted you to go with me to the club."

"I have a great deal of business to do this morning, Sir George, and though, of course, I should be delighted to make a longer visit, it is impossible. Have you any commands for Herefordshire? I am going out of town this afternoon."

"Have I any commands for Herefordshire?" reiterated Sir George. "What on earth do you mean, my dear Arthur? You are not going to waste any of your precious hours amidst the rooks and the ravens of Springfield, exactly when London is beginning to be alive? The idea is perfectly monstrous and impossible. I won't believe it. It is positively too absurd."

"Is it?" replied the young man, endeavouring to force a smile. "I have a fancy for seeing my own roses blow, but if I find the doing so too dreadful to bear I shall come back again."

"Take my word for it, my dear fellow, you will post down for no other purpose in the world but to post up again. Do not be so fanciful and foolish. It is not like you, Arthur," said Sir George, with more gravity than he often said any thing, and probably with much more sincerity of feeling.

"I grieve to differ from you," was the light reply, "but go I absolutely must. Good morning, Miss Meddows. Good-bye, Sir George. I shall see you when I come to town again; though when that may happen to be, I cannot exactly say."

Clara, who was now as pale as Dalrymple had been a few minutes before, answered not a word. She bowed mechanically, a salute which he returned with much ceremony, and the next moment he was gone. Sir George followed him, and then Clara dropped into a chair with a fulness of misery, and perfection of hopelessness, such as she had never felt before.

She now became aware of the presence of young Chesterfield, from the extreme annoyance it caused her, and with a movement of fretful wretchedness, which she had never before given way to, she said, "Pray leave me, Mr. Chesterfield; I am not at leisure now to talk to you."

Charles, notwithstanding all his recent glory, was still much too humble to feel himself offended by this unceremonious dismissal, and in an accent rather penitent than angry said, "I am sorry, then, that I interrupted you!" after which he retreated with a noiseless step, and gently shutting the door made his way back to the hall, let himself out without disturbing any other

part of the household, and returned to his lodgings without the slightest consciousness of having received a rebuff. But if he did not feel that she had been rude and unkind, poor Clara herself did, and shed contrite tears for the degrading weakness which could make her imperious to the unoffending and humble Charles, because the proud and unobservant Dalrymple had given this new proof of his indifference.

Dalrymple kept his word; he did leave town; he did see his own roses blow; and only returned to London at the end of June, about a week after he had completed his twenty-ninth year, for the purpose of settling accounts with his guardian, and arranging his affairs preparatory to an expedition to Russia, which he intended should occupy him for a couple of years.

The affairs of Charles meanwhile went on and prospered marvellously. The success of his prologue gave him all the courage he wanted, and when he again sat down to his writing-desk, it was with the determination of completing the story he had begun for *The Regenerator*, before he read the two models intrusted to him by the "mighty master." "If I succeed without imitation," thought he, "Mr. Marchmont will naturally prefer it, as it will give greater variety to his pages; and if not, I shall have time enough before the next number to show what I can do, either in the sublime or the comic style, with his finished models before me. I am quite sure that I am capable of both."

With this comfortable conviction he proceeded rapidly, and though he twice took the trouble of transcribing his manuscript, for the sake of improving and re-improving the composition, he had finished it by the time Mr. Marchmont told him it would be required. "Bring it me on Wednesday morning," had been the command of Mr. Marchmont. The last manuscript was completed on Tuesday morning before he sat down to his solitary cup of tea and penny roll; for since he had been really at work he had constantly breakfasted at his lodgings.

He was pleased with what he had done, and in truth felt perfectly happy. Mrs. Gibson's party for the evening made his heart flutter with anticipated triumph; he knew that Mrs. Sherbourne was to be there, and, remembering all the touching softness of her manner to him in private, doubted not of her so far distinguishing him in public as to make him the most envied man in the room.

"It is quite odd," thought he, "how much she has put the beauty of Miss Meddows out of my head;" and as he thought of this he stirred his tea perseveringly for several minutes, without at all knowing what he was about. "Yet Clara is far lovelier," he went on, "and she likes me very much, too; but there is

something—something so much more—I don't know what—something so much more overcoming to one's heart in Mrs. Sherbourne. Oh, Bessy! Bessy! how could I ever fancy that you were the most beautiful girl in the world! She is no more compared to Miss Meddows than a daisy to a camilla—and in the way of bewitchingness, Mrs. Sherbourne beats her out and out. The fact is, nobody knows what's what till they come to London."

At this point of his ruminations Charles swallowed the remainder of his first cup of tea, and prepared to pour out a second, but discovered that he had neglected to replenish the tea-pot.

"I know what little Bessy was good for at any rate," he continued, looking disconsolately into his empty tea-pot, "and that was, to give one a comfortable breakfast, without having the plague of thinking about it. Dear little soul! how neat and bright she used to look, trotting in from the dairy, with her little mug of beautiful cream in one hand, and a plate of new-churned butter in the other! Let me see who I will, and fall in love with who I will, I shall never quite forget her!"

This acknowledgment seemed to touch the inconstant's own heart a little, for it is a positive fact, though there was nobody present, save himself, to bear witness to it, that a tear actually rose in his eye, lingered there for a moment, and then trickled down his cheek.

"This is what they call being home-sick, I suppose," he exclaimed, starting up and dashing away the tell-tale of his still unconquered feelings. "It will wear off in time, I dare say, and so much the better, for, faith and troth, it makes me feel like a baby. If I gave way to the whim, I think I could cry for an hour only because I happened to remember some of that little girl's pretty ways. However, I don't want to forget her altogether, neither. No, nor any of them, not even the kind-hearted Mr. Westbrook, though he is such a twaddle, as Mr. Marchmont calls it, and, what's more, I will write to them both before I read a word of the two tales. I am half afraid to look at those tales for fear I should get out of conceit with my own. Yet it is cowardly to feel so, for I know in the very bottom of my heart that there is merit in what I have done, and a good deal too."

Half muttering, and half meditating these wayward fancies, Charles set aside his tea-board, replaced his little desk at its now familiar corner of the table, and wrote the following letters with great rapidity. Ere he began, however, he pondered a little upon the two initiatory phrases, "Honoured sir," and "Dear Mr. Westbrook." A few weeks before he would most undoubtedly have chosen the former; but now, rather ashamed of his hesitation, and suddenly cutting it short, he wrote,

“DEAR MR. WESTBROOK,—It was very kind of you to answer my first letter so quickly, and, you may depend upon it, I never shall forget your kindness in all ways. You tell me to communicate to you all particulars of my literary progress, and likewise my observations on the advancement that learning is making in the metropolis. Your first question may be easily and very pleasantly answered. I am getting on very greatly beyond my most sanguine hopes, for I am already engaged to write every month for a work called *The Regenerator*, which is considered, as I am informed by excellent authority, to be by far the most able and influential publication of the present day. The editor of this celebrated miscellany is Mr. Marchmont, a name so well known to the whole literary world that our ignorance of it, my dear sir, is a sad proof of the intellectual darkness in which we have been living at Charlton. I have also tried my pen, and I am happy to say with very flattering success, on a prologue which is to be spoken at the first representation of ‘*The Morning Star*,’ a drama in five acts, from the well-known pen of the celebrated Mrs. Sherbourne—one of the most gifted women of the present age. Nothing can exceed the kindness with which this admirable lady has accepted this little effort. Mr. Marchmont also considers it to be very good; and I would certainly send you a copy of it, were it not that I have, upon the best advice, been induced to adorn it with some of the peculiarities which distinguish one of the two great classes into which English literature is now divided, and I doubt if it would be quite intelligible to you at present. I am afraid that this explanation may appear in some degree obscure to you; but I am sorry to say that just at present I cannot venture to become more explicit. The subject is not without its difficulties.

“In answer to your second question, my dear sir, respecting the opinion which I have formed of the progress that learning is making in the metropolis, I can only reply, generally, that the human mind appears just now to be propelled forward with a vehement vigour which might almost terrify the looker-on, were we not at the same time assured by the greatest philosophers of the modern world that this extraordinary movement is as glorious in its results as unprecedented in its rapidity. That a flood of knowledge thus rushing forward, as it were, like a majestic cataract, should level in its course all antique prejudices, and overthrow a prodigious number of existing opinions, can reasonably be matter of astonishment to no one. I will not deny that I have acquired ideas in the great emporium of mind which at the first view startled me. But I have already learned to misdoubt my doubts, and, with the humility becoming one so ignorant, have

proclaimed myself ready to abandon all my former crude notions and worn-out opinions, as soon as I shall hear them contradicted by those who have nobly put themselves in the van of modern learning, or rather let me say, my dear sir, of modern *intelligence*, for the confined sense in which it has been customary among us to use this word *learning* has thrown something of contempt, not to say ridicule, upon it, which renders it disagreeably obnoxious to the disciples of the present world of letters. Surrounded by all the inducements to profound study and lofty speculation which this noble metropolis affords, my letters must of necessity be short; but believe me, I entreat you, my dear sir, now and always, your very affectionate pupil,

“CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.”

Having finished this epistle, Charles read it over, and congratulated himself upon having very skilfully got over ground which he felt it was difficult to travel in company with his worthy, but totally unenlightened, old friend. Yet, despite this approval, he was rather conscious, on reaching the signature, that the composition was not so affectionate as it ought to be. “That I should continue to reverence as a sage a man whose mind is so perfectly enveloped in darkness is impossible,” thought he; “but there can surely be no intellectual degradation in still loving the old man;” and with this feeling he added, as a postscript, “I hope that, as the season advances, you will enjoy the sunshine in your pretty arbour, and that you will sometimes think of your old scholar when you are sitting there. Does dear old Tabby follow you as she used to do, and purr and rub herself against your legs with the same comfortable certainty of being welcome? I must not envy your cat; that would be *infra dig.* in a London author, but I should like to have a look at you and Tabby now and then, if it were possible. But I am afraid it is impossible to have all that we love and admire about us at the same time.”

In writing to little Bessy there were difficulties also, and he sat for above a minute with his pen suspended over the paper before he decided how to begin this letter also. “She is still but a child,” said he, “and it would be any thing but wise to treat her otherwise.” After this very judicious reflection, his embarrassment vanished, and, with all the conscious self-approval which acting with discretion is sure to give, he wrote—

“MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL,—Though you certainly know no more about London than your favourite pigeon, you will be able to understand that when a man is fairly launched into the great world, it is very difficult for him to find time to write letters; and you must always keep this in mind, my dear little friend,

whenever a longer interval than usual elapses without your hearing from me. Though you certainly cannot understand much about London authorship, I think you may be able to guess a little how different must be the life of a man who writes for *The Regenerator* (the most influential periodical in the world), from that which I used to lead at Maplebury. At this very moment, Bessy, two works of great importance, as yet unpublished, but confessed to be models by one most capable of judging them,—at this very moment these two works are lying on my desk unread! Will not this lessen your wonder, my dear child, if you find this letter a short one? I hope you are all quite well at Maplebury. Pray give my love to my father, mother, Kit, and Susan, by no means forgetting yourself; and believe me to be, my dear little girl, your very affectionate friend,

“CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.”

Charles read this letter too after he had finished it, and blushed a little as he did so. The figure of Bessy in the moonlit porch, and as she had sat beside him on the turf seat in the orchard on the night before he set off for London, rose vividly before him. Perhaps something like a comparison between Bessy on the bank, and Mrs. Sherbourne on the sofa, suggested itself; but if so, he drove it from him as an idle thought, exceedingly unprofitable, and altogether wrong; and, without venturing upon any post-script at all, he hastily folded the letter and sealed it.

This duty performed, the young man settled himself anew at his desk, and laid his hand upon the precious pages he was about to peruse.

“Now then,” said he, “I will give my whole soul to the study of this great man’s style. Surely this is the proudest moment of my life! An unpublished MS. of Marchmont’s before me! I can hardly believe it. Gracious Heaven! What a new existence, and how strangely like what I used to dream of between sleeping and waking, when lying beside the dear little river in the copse! The transcendental and the burlesque! Here they are both, and each of them beyond all question the very perfection of its genus.

“Which shall I take first? Let me see their titles. ‘Responsibility: a tale.’ That might be either grave or gay, according to the master’s will. And the other, ‘Desperation.’ Nay, that settles it. This must be tragedy, and here I will begin. I long at once to follow him in his highest flight.

DESPERATION.

A NARRATIVE FOUNDED ON FACT.

ON the 17th November, 1823, the streets of London were so densely crammed with yellow fog, that by half-past three in the

afternoon, it became wholly impossible to see across the narrowest of them. At this moment an individual might have been remarked walking rapidly down Monmouth-street, towards the Seven Dials. His appearance, if not prepossessing, was at least remarkable, and no one who had ever looked at him earnestly for five minutes was at all likely to forget him again. His age might have been about thirty-seven or thirty-eight; his stature rather below the middle size, and with no marked propensity either to leanness or the reverse. His hair was brown, and cut short; his eyes rather of a light blue; his mouth not ill-formed, and garnished with a set of moderately white teeth; his nose was neither Greek nor Roman, but something between both; and his complexion, though by no means remarkable in any way, was rather fresh-coloured than otherwise; his coat was blue, and of the manufacture known by the name of second cloth; his waistcoat red and black, in stripes, with small black spots upon the red stripe, and small red spots upon the black; his cravat consisted of a cotton kerchief, of which the preponderating colour was yellow, though a wavy line of dingy purple might be traced at intervals through the whole of it; his trousers were composed of what is technically termed mixed cloth; his stockings were invisible, but were in truth of black and white worsted, considerably the worse for wear; his shoes, for boots he had none, had the appearance of being greatly more brown than black—the blacking process having indeed been altogether neglected; his beaver was in tolerably good shape, but nevertheless had evidently seen better days; and his gloves were of coarse strong-knitted worsted. Such was the being who now, as we have said, walked rapidly onwards through Monmouth-street, in the direction of the Seven Dials.

“Oh, it is cold,” he uttered, “very cold.”

Yet still he urged his steps onwards, onwards, onwards, nor stopped till he reached the yawning entrance to a cellar, the door of which stood open, notwithstanding the rigorous rudeness of the season.

Whatever might be his purpose, it was evident that concealment at this moment made no part of it; for he descended the broken and slippery steps without care or caution of any kind, and reached the bottom of them at last with that sort of unsteady abruptness, which indicates an almost total want of thought.

“Marry come up, Mr. Figgins!” exclaimed Mrs. Brawley, the lady who, carrying on in this profound retreat the subterraneous profession of oyster-seller to the most fashionable portion of the neighbourhood, retained the respect so justly her due by never permitting any thing to pass in her presence unchallenged and

unreproved. "Marry come up, Mr. Figgins!" said she, "I marvels at your imperdence, coming down upon one after that fashion." "No offence, Mrs. Brawley, by your leave," replied the remarkable stranger, walking straight up to a fire that burned with inviting brightness in the most distant corner of the uncouth apartment.

"Hoffence hindeed! and I should be 'appy to know vot sitch as the likes of you calls hoffence?" screamed the shrew. "You'd think it no hoffence, maybe, to fire yourself out of a cannon into a lady's room, and knock her brains out with your bullet of a 'ed."

"I ax your pardon then, Mrs. Brawley," replied the person she called Figgins; "I should count sitch a hact as the unperlitest thing in natur."

"You vud, vud you, then vot for do you come thundering down my stairs that way? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, and that's the truth, and no lie."

The female who uttered this was short, fat, and exceedingly red in the nose. Her dress was sordid in the extreme, being composed of black stuff, which seemed to have an extraneous surface of grease, that caused it to shine in the fire-light, as with arms a-kimbo she stood before the flaming grate. Cap she had none, but a large and very dirty blue handkerchief, spotted with white, covered her head, and crossing under her chin was tied behind, the ends hanging down upon her back. An apron which had once been white, but which could boast this hue of purity no longer, adorned the front of her person, while her bosom was sheltered by a ragged shawl, which hung over her fat shoulders in scollops.

Though there was nothing in this figure to propitiate kindness, or even civility, and though her manners, still more than her appearance, seemed an antidote to both, the demeanour of Figgins, if such indeed was his name, underwent no alteration, but continued uniformly gentle and obliging, in spite of all she could say to provoke him. Those indeed who had watched him narrowly might have perceived a quivering of the lip, a nervous motion about the eye, an occasional start, and an anxious restless watchfulness in his manner of turning his head towards the stairs, that might have taught them to explain this gentleness, by proving that he was not at that moment in a state to quarrel with any one. It was evident that some heavy anxiety weighed upon him, though of what nature, it was by no means easy to define.

His manner seemed not, however, to excite either interest or suspicion in the mind of Mrs. Brawley, for having continued her maundering, till apparently weary of its non-effect, she suddenly

broke off, and said, probably in as civil a tone as she was mistress of,

“Vell then, Mr. Figgins, I suppose you’ll be after having some hoysters, von’t you?”

The individual she thus addressed started as if he had seen a spectre. He laid his hand upon the woman’s arm, and, looking almost wildly in her face, exclaimed,

“Gracious Heaven! Am I come to this? Must I bend the craven knee and sue for mercy here?”

Large drops of sweat stood upon his forehead, his lips were as pale as ashes, and though firmly built, and even athletic for his size, he trembled from head to foot like an infant. It was impossible to look at him without emotion.

“Vat’s in the vind now?” cried Mrs. Brawley, fixing her great eyes upon him with something between terror and astonishment.

“If there bean’t mischief brewing somewhere, I’ll never trust nobody’s looks no more. Out with it, man! If I had a mind to peach, I might do it now as safe as after you’d told all. What gallows job have you been after?”

“Woman!” returned the stranger, with an accent which made even her hard nature shudder. “Woman! I have committed murder! Murder, woman! Bloody, bloody murder!”

“The devil you have, you big blackguard?” she replied; “and that’s what makes you come sneaking here, is it!”

“No words! no trifling!” cried he whom she had distinguished by the name of Figgins. “The grave yawns before me. The gallows lifts its everlasting arms to seize and throw me into it. Speak, say, decide at once. Will you save me? No shuffling, no doubt; yes or no?”

Oh nature! How wondrous are thy sympathies! This coarse hard female, vicious, intemperate, corrupted, as she had become, was yet a woman still! For one short moment of tremendous doubt, she remained gazing in the face of the wretched man whose fate hung upon her lips, and none might say from that hard countenance what might be the workings of the soul within.

But at length she exclaimed with the voice of a stentor, and in the attitude of a boxer, “Yes, by the living jingo! and him vat comes to nab you ’ere, old boy, shall have my ten commandments writ upon his cheeks, to say nothing of his eyes, and that vill be the very best he’ll get.”

The revulsion of feeling produced by this cordial burst was more than the agitated man could bear, and ere her powerful arm could be extended to save him, he fell prostrate at her feet.

* * * * *

As Charles Chesterfield read these last words there was a sharp

knocking at the house-door, which caused him to start almost as violently as if he had been in the predicament of Mr. Figgins, for he was in truth completely absorbed in the task on which he was employed, his attention being fascinated not only by the extremely pleasing nature of the narrative itself, but also by the earnest desire he felt to discover the object of the great master in its composition. What might it mean? Could this be intended for the sublime? Could it be comic? One or the other he had been told it was, and one or the other he was sure it must be—but which? To which of the two great classes did it belong? Notwithstanding the extremely deep interest of the story, these questions recurred perpetually like the note of the trumpet, heard at intervals above all the other instruments in that anthem of anthems, “The dead shall be raised,” and, like that, bringing back the mind to the *general subject*.

This struggle, however, between his imagination and his critical judgment was not destined to endure, for before he had fully recovered the startling effects of the knocking, his own parlour-door opened, and Mr. Marchmont stood before him. He appeared considerably agitated, was heated and out of breath, evidently from the effects of having walked too rapidly; he addressed no word to his astonished host, but, fixing his eager eyes upon the table and the desk, darted instantly forward, and seizing upon the manuscript upon which Charles was occupied, sank upon a chair, tossed his hat upon the floor, drew forth a handkerchief where-with he wiped his heated brows, and at length exclaimed,

“Thank God, it’s safe! I have got hold of it again, and that is better luck than I deserved.”

“What is safe, Mr. Marchmont? What is it that has been in danger? And wherefore are you so agitated?” said Charles, standing opposite to his unexpected visiter, and staring at him with equal surprise and curiosity.

“Have you such a thing as a glass of brandy, Chesterfield?” eagerly demanded Mr. Marchmont.

“No, indeed, sir, I have not,” replied the young man; “but I dare say the girl of the house could get some for you. Shall I send out, sir?”

“Yes, my dear fellow, do, for mercy’s sake : for I declare to you, upon my life and honour, that I am half dead.”

Charles immediately rang the bell, and gave the necessary orders, and then, turning again to his patron, and perceiving that after carefully rolling up the manuscript, he was preparing to put it in his pocket, he ventured to say,

“Oh, pray sir, do not take it away with you, it is so very interesting.”

"Interesting?" replied Marchmont, adding, with a slight laugh, "I believe so, indeed. You want to learn it by rote, I suppose; but that won't do. You have had time to read it over a dozen times, at least, and if you will believe me, I never found out what you had got till this morning—this hour, in fact this half hour. Faith, Chesterfield, you have got the devil's luck and your own too, to get sight of what was intrusted to me in so very private a manner."

Though puzzled and mystified beyond measure, Charles answered very ingenuously, "I have certainly had it long enough to read it through many times, Mr. Marchmont, and yet I give you my word that I have not done so. I have only taken it up within the last half hour; and, to tell you the truth, I am heartily glad you are come, for I began to feel greatly at a loss as to the classification of it. This story then, called 'Desperation,' is not your own composition?"

"No, sir, it is not," replied Mr. Marchmont, with an air of mystery, and with the air of one who intended not to say more than he could help.

"I am glad to hear it," said Charles, "for I may now without scruple confess to you that I cannot conceive it to belong to the transcendental or the burlesque school. I now presume that it is a species of erratic composition that belongs to neither."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I beg your pardon. It is in all respects the perfection of both, because it is in every sense of the phrase *sui generis*, and is composed in a spirit too enlarged to be easily defined, and too admirable to be fairly classed with any other. Nevertheless, a professional critic like myself, accustomed to analysis, and what may be called the habit of literary dissection, can hardly fail to perceive that the enormous power displayed in this new school arises from its having availed itself of an immense mass of materials which have never been made use of before. Talk of Shakspeare? why, my dear sir, it is as evident as that two and two make four, that notwithstanding the wide range which that old gentleman's fancy certainly took, going, as we all know, very absurdly beyond the limits of existing nature, he nevertheless constantly shackled himself by the pedantic notion of poetical fitness. As if all things in earth and heaven, from the rising sun, robed in its eastern splendour, to the felon in Newgate, or the fish-wife at her stall, were not all equally worthy of being converted to the purposes of a man of genius? Why in Apollo's name should Cleopatra be held a worthier theme than Billingsgate Moll or Clerkenwell Bess? It is nonsense to cant about morality, you know; for not only this dark-browed queen, but lots of other ladies, to whom nobody objects as heroines, have terribly bad

reputations. No no, that was not it. Poetical exclusiveness rested on far different grounds, and whatever you may think of it, young man, the reform bill had as much to do in throwing open these long-neglected treasures of human interest, as in throwing open our boroughs. All hail! to both, say I. Nor have we done yet, Chesterfield. Universal suffrage has yet to come in both ways; and when we obtain the vote by ballot, we shall obtain at the same time, perhaps, such outpourings from the profoundest depths of the social scale, as shall make old tight-laced tragedy look pale for shame of her own weakness. But I am opening my heart to you as if you were indeed a well-trying friend and ally, and such in truth I hope to find you. It was only chance, however, I will tell you that frankly, which put these pages in your hand. As yet they belong to their author, and not to me, for we have not yet come to terms. He demands an enormous price for them, and yet he is but just beginning his new career. He confesses himself to be but an imitator of the great masters, but there is a boldness in the sketch that shows of what he is capable. Do you not think it admirable?"

"I hope, sir, you will let me read it to the end," said Charles, "I can hardly judge of it by what I have yet read."

"Impossible, Chesterfield! I am thankful that I arrived in time to prevent your going on with it. The catastrophe is completely new, and of a kind to eclipse every thing that has been done yet. Tyburn!—paugh!—Tyburn is nothing to it! It would be the greatest possible injustice to the author, as well as to ourselves, if we became the purchasers, to let it be noised abroad. This work will make a new stepping-stone, you may depend upon it, to lead us down towards the most terrific depths of sin, a dozen fathom lower I trust than we have ever been before! The power is stupendous, I assure you. The Great Western engine is a tea-kettle compared to it. With such a press as ours, Mr. Chesterfield, and with such institutions as we may soon hope to possess, I see not but that we may fairly expect to have every species of restraint removed which now cripples the native energies of man. Talk of the light of the mind! In that respect we may be said at this moment to be in a state of general conflagration—blazing in all directions; and truly we may declare that nothing shall be hid from the light thereof. Where is there ignorance now, Chesterfield? There is not a school-boy of ten years old—nor for that matter a school-girl either, who may not in our days know more about every species of sin and suffering, high-minded desperate daring, and that noble courage which fears neither god nor devil, than all their grandfathers put together. It is a fine spectacle, a very fine spectacle, Chesterfield!"

During this speech the maid of the house entered with a glass of brandy, and it was a great proof of the earnestness with which Mr. Marchmont spoke, that he did not raise it to his lips till he had finished. Then he tossed it off, and, rising at the same time, said, "Give me the other manuscript too, my good fellow, and I will take it home with me."

"But I have not read it yet, sir," said Charles, in some confusion, and conscious that the delay must give him the appearance of great indifference.

"Indeed," returned Mr. Marchmont, coldly; "then you cannot be very anxious about it."

"Quite the contrary, quite the contrary, sir," returned Charles with great earnestness; "I delayed the reading till I had finished my own story, only because I was afraid of being tempted to imitate it more closely than you might approve."

"You could hardly have done any thing so likely to improve your production. However, being proprietor as well as editor, it is my interest to encourage originality in all ways. It is the most valuable quality after all. You have then finished your story?"

"I have, sir," replied Chesterfield, endeavouring to speak with composure.

"Give it to me, then. I am glad to find you are so punctual."

Charles put the two manuscripts into his hand together, and affected to smile gaily as he did it; but in truth he was too much agitated to speak.

"That's right. Good morning. We shall meet at the Gibsons', of course."

And so saying, the great man nodded his head, took up his hat, and departed, leaving Charles in a state of nervousness between hope and fear, that made him about equally long for and dread the hour of meeting; for he well knew there was abundance of time for Mr. Marchmont to read the whole of his composition before that hour arrived, and, feeling quite sure that he would do so, he felt as if his fate altogether depended upon the next few hours.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Toilet Intellectual—"A charming Group"—Sir George Meddows suffers a *Désenchantement*—An Illustration of Milton—Vanity's Punishment.

It was very rarely that Miss Meddows profited by the general invitation which she had received for all Mrs. Gibson's Tuesday evening parties; but Sir George having declared that it was his purpose to go, and his wish that she should go likewise, she submitted, though feeling much more disposed to plead illness, and go to bed, than to become one of the admiring throng assembled

to gaze on Mrs. Gibson's lions. Mrs. Longuéville, however, declared that another evening at Mrs. Gibson's would decidedly be her death ; so she sent for an old lady to play at piquet with her ; and the baronet, with his daughter, entered Mrs. Gibson's drawing-room together with the *protégé*, to whom Sir George graciously said, about five minutes before they set off—" You may go with us, if you will, Charles, because Mrs. Longuéville stays at home."

The rooms were very nearly full, for the expected presence of Mrs. Sherbourne had been industriously circulated, and many came for the purpose of meeting a lady who had a forthcoming play announced at one of the great theatres. But if this lady was the centre of attraction to others, Mr. Marchmont was the centre of attraction to her ; and it might be accounted fortunate for Mrs. Gibson that it was so ; for had it been otherwise, had his enormous appetite for flattery, usually so highly pampered in that drawing-room, been starved by seeing all its expected dainties handed over to another, it might be difficult to guess to what extremities of rabbose rage the unwonted disappointment might have driven him. But from this he was happily saved by the adulation of a single worshipper. No one knew better than Mrs. Sherbourne how to administer the sweet opiate ; and no one could be more earnestly bent than she was, on the present occasion, upon exhibiting the delicious drug with effect.

Mr. Marchmont had dined with his dear friends, as the thoughtful Mrs. Gibson always took care he should do, whenever she had reason to believe that her evening party would be either too large or too fine to make a restorative little supper convenient. He well knew too who he was about to meet, as whenever any person remarkable in any way was expected, he always received notice of it ; an attention as profitable to Mrs. Gibson as to himself, inasmuch as it enabled him always to assume a style and a tone suitable to the occasion. In the present instance he had not only Mrs. Sherbourne, but Miss Meddows to prepare for, and it was for many reasons his intention to be peculiarly effective. He had heard much of Miss Meddows, her beauty, talents, foreign education, and heiresship ; and though he had heard much of Mrs. Sherbourne also, it was certainly his intention to bestow himself chiefly on the former and younger lady. Never perhaps had he bestowed more care on his appearance than he did that night. His hair, which for some time past he had been nourishing into great length, was parted transversely from above his left eye, across his head, both divisions being carefully lodged behind his rather capacious ears, and permitted to hang down in a wavy line, not wholly the work of nature, to about midway the collar

of his coat. The wristbands of his shirt-sleeves were turned back like a widow's weepers; and the only confinement to which his shirt was submitted consisted of a broad black ribbon, over which his shirt-collar was turned, hanging over that of his coat like a schoolboy's of the last century. This Mr. Marchmont called the "Vandyck style," and often declared that he considered it to be the duty of every Englishman to adopt it, in the hope of rivalling the exquisitely picturesque aspect of *La Jeune France*, as seen in the theatres, and on the Boulevards. "They must not leave us behind them in every thing!" were the words he used, when advocating this remarkable style of dress. "It is mortification enough to remember, that where we have one popular political movement, they have a dozen." Urged by this patriotic spirit of emulation, as well as by the lofty ambition—

"That best infirmity of noble minds—" which ever propelled him to be in the van of all innovation, Mr. Marchmont's appearance on the present occasion was much too striking to be overlooked by either of the two ladies, in whose eyes he most particularly wished to be distinguished—and he was distinguished by them, not only as a very remarkable-looking individual indeed, but each, though neither had ever seen him before, felt certain at the first glance that it was Mr. Marchmont who stood before her. "That extremely queer-looking person must be the man I have so carefully avoided," thought Clara. "But it matters not! He whose dislike of him engendered mine is no longer within reach of being disgusted by his approach!—I need not avoid him for his sake now."

"Marchmont! As sure as I live, that is Marchmont," reasoned Mrs. Sherbourne. "How deliciously original he looks!—I must win him, if I never steal into the heart of mortal man again!"

Mrs. Gibson was in full glory. The remarkable loveliness of Miss Meddows, and that striking elegance of appearance which distinguishes every beautiful woman who has the good taste to let her dress be rather in accordance with the fashion of the day, than a servile specimen of it, drew all eyes upon her, and seemed of itself sufficient to render the scene brilliant. The lady, who at least for a week or two was likely to be more talked about than any other authoress in London, sat beside her on the same sofa, dividing the curiosity, if not the admiration; while before them stood the great Regenerator, looking at once proudly indifferent, intellectually wild, and as exquisitely unlike an English gentleman, as it was possible for any man to do.

"What a group!" exclaimed the delighted Mrs. Gibson, with a degree of gratified vanity, which could hardly have been greater had she been herself conscious of possessing in her single person

the attractions and the fame of all these. She had already presented her highly favoured friend to both the ladies, and now, with the delightful consciousness of having a right to be first of the first in her own drawing-room, she placed an arm-chair in the front of the sofa, and, turning her back upon the rest of the company, determined to lead the conversation to subjects that should suit them all, and at the same time bring her own peculiar talents into play.

“How rarely it is in our power to bring together three persons so worthy of being known to each other!” she said, looking successively at each. “You have no idea what delight I have in being the composer of such a trio! I feel like an alchymist, who having long meditated on the value of sundry precious materials, brings them together and finds he has produced—GOLD.”

Mrs. Sherbourne looked meekly in the face of Mrs. Gibson, and performed a languid smile; and then, raising her large eyes to the face of Marchmont, looked steadily at him for a moment, with an earnestness of examination which evidently rendered her perfectly oblivious of what she was about. After which a sort of slight trembling seemed to run through her frame—it might have been a quiver of delight—or it might have been a species of timid shudder, such as weak mortals are supposed to feel in presence of a being of superior nature to themselves—or it might have been that she read her fate, literary, amatory, or financial, in his expressive eyes (for it may be observed that though Mrs. Sherbourne dressed very elegantly, she never omitted an opportunity of intimating the lowly state of her exchequer to very nearly all who would listen to her); whatever the cause of this stedfast gaze, and its subsequent effect upon her frame, it was so far successful as to awaken the attention and pique the curiosity of its object. He stood meanwhile, looking as tall and intellectual as he possibly could, but though far from being insensible to the remarkable attack made upon him by the eyes of the poetess, he as yet still persevered in his intention of bestowing himself chiefly on the beauty and the heiress; and though he gave Mrs. Sherbourne in return one of those queer mystical looks, which, like her own, produced its chief effect by setting the object of it to interpret what it could possibly mean, his glances were chiefly bent upon Clara. But he almost believed that she had not heard the exciting words of Mrs. Gibson, nor perceived that he himself was looking at her. Had he believed it quite, he would not have deceived himself.

“I have had the honour of seeing Miss Meddows before,” he said, in a deep low tone, worthy of Kean in the days of his best whisper.

"Have you?" said Mrs. Gibson, briskly; "I thought you told me that you had never met her?"

"I never had the happiness of meeting Miss Meddows in society before," he replied, with a slight sigh. "But I have seen her nevertheless."

"Where was it you saw her, then?" demanded Mrs. Gibson.

"This sounds quite romantic, doesn't it?"

"I saw her from the Countess of Raymond's box at the Opera. Miss Meddows was in that of Lady Wycomb," he replied.

"And when was that, Marchmont?" said Mrs. Gibson, looking exceedingly playful. "You positively must give us a history of the whole affair."

"It will be two years on the fifth of next May," was the solemn answer; delivered with an accent and manner that seemed to have much meaning.

"Upon my word and honour, my dear Miss Meddows, this looks rather suspicious," observed Mrs. Gibson, nodding her head.

"You have a capital memory, my good friend. I dare say you could tell us, too, what the young lady had on? was it a black dress or white? blue dress or grey?"

"There are things which, though seemingly trifling, can never be forgotten," he answered; adding, in a very low mutter, as he stooped beside the sofa to pick up his glove, thereby bringing his head very near to that of Clara, "and these are of them."

A slight frown contracted the brow of the favoured lady, while the vexed poetess vowed a little vow that she would make him turn away from the proud beauty, and live in her eyes only, before the evening was over, though it should cost her the labour of a whole volume to effect it.

If Mr. Marchmont perceived Miss Meddows's frown, he did not heed it, for, drawing a chair to the corner of the sofa on which she sat, and so seating himself in it as to place himself exactly behind her, he entered into conversation with a low voice, and with his hand so resting upon one of the cushions as to give her very much the appearance of being supported against his arm. Inexpressibly provoked, she drew so closely towards Mrs. Sherbourne as considerably to annoy her in the petty manœuvrings of her miniature person; but this retreat was by no means an effectual one, and Clara was meditating on the desperate measure of breaking up Mrs. Gibson's "charming group" and crossing the room, when she was relieved by the unexpected approach of Miss Marianne Gibson, who, though she had scarcely ever exchanged a dozen words with her, now addressed her as if they had been intimately acquainted for years, saying, "Miss Meddows, if you will come over to my little table, I will show

you something that will make you laugh, and I will promise, moreover, that nobody shall come near to plague you."

Clara waited not for any further invitation, but, standing up with a bright, grateful smile, passed her arm under that of her deliverer, and accompanied her across the room. There the eccentric Marianne had established herself, as usual, with her writing-paper and scissors, her shaded wax-lights and her low chair. "You did look so very unhappy!" said she, opening her little portfolio, as if to search for something, "that I could not help coming to your rescue."

"And most truly do I thank you for it," replied Clara, laughing; "I had all the inclination in the world to run away, only I knew not where to run to."

"I can secrete you here very safely," said Marianne, pointing to her own chair; that is to say, if you really prefer so inglorious a position to all the honours from which I snatched you."

"I do prefer it," replied Clara, placing herself in the offered chair; "and now I hope you mean to sit down by me, and show me what it is I am to laugh at."

Without replying, Marianne drew forth a group of four figures, cut in white paper, and, laying them on the dark cover of her portfolio, asked her new friend if she had ever seen any thing like them.

"What miraculous rapidity!" exclaimed Clara, "and what singular talent! There we are, as like as paper can make us!" And in truth the group presented an extremely clever resemblance of the sofa, as it had been a few moments before, with Mrs. Gibson in front and Mr. Marchmont in the rear of it. "And do you serve all your friends and acquaintance thus?" demanded Clara, looking at her with considerable interest and curiosity. "Yes, a good many of them," was the reply. "It is really my only resource on my mother's tremendous Tuesday evenings—I do not sing, neither can I talk blue, and so I indulge myself with a quire of paper and a pair of scissors."

"And do you always show the people your caricatures of them as honestly as you have done to me? You are very courageous."

"No! There you are especially favoured—I would not venture, for instance, to show this to the pair opposite;" and she drew forth another milk-white group, nicely cut, and having an easily recognisable resemblance to Sir George Meddows and Miss Almeria Gibson, who were seated, Marianne said, nearly opposite; the lady reclining very gracefully against the retreating back of a very deep arm-chair, at the risk of exposing a well-dressed and pretty foot and ankle, and the gentleman seated very close beside, or rather in front of her, holding his hat between his knees, and

peering with an air of rather undoubting confidence in her face.

"Pray, Miss Meddows," said Marianne, as she corrected her work by an additional snip or two, "do you happen to know which of the five Miss Gibsons it is to whom a partial relative left twenty thousand pounds?"

"No, indeed, I do not," replied Clara, looking surprised at the question.

"The pains they take to keep it a secret will never answer," said Marianne; "for let a gentleman advance as far as he will in the utterance of preliminary sweetness, and the performance of preliminary *œillades*, he would have no scruple at retreating again to the greatest imaginable distance, if he discovered that he had made a blunder. Don't you agree with me, Miss Meddows?"

"Upon my word you puzzle me," said Clara, "I hardly know what you are talking about, and not at all to what persons you allude."

"Well then—never mind. Only, if you should happen to meet with any gentleman, either old or young, who might, in your opinion, be likely to make a mistake upon the subject, you may just mention, if you like it, that it is the little quiz Marianne Gibson who has the fortune, and that she means to bestow herself and it upon a clerical cousin as soon as he has taken orders."

Miss Meddows would certainly have thought this unexpected confidence very unnecessary, had she not remarked, as she listened to it, so decided a flirtation between her father and the tender Almeria, as convinced her that it was not made without design.

"Will you keep this place for me if I wander away from it for a minute or two?" said Clara, suddenly determined to communicate the information she had received to her father. The well-meaning but strange Marianne nodded assent, and Miss Meddows crossed the room to the spot where her father was so agreeably occupied as not to perceive her approach till she was close to him.

"Will you take us to look at your mamma's new illustrations for her Milton?" said she, addressing Almeria; "I perceive a table there quite covered with them." To refuse was impossible, and, however reluctantly, the fair lady was obliged to rise, and break up the delightful *tête-à-tête*.

"You will come too, papa, will you not?" said Clara.

"Unquestionably!—you have chosen a conductor, Clara, whom all the world would wish to follow."

Having reached the table, Miss Meddows began to turn over the heterogeneous mass of engravings which lay upon it; and after employing herself thus for a minute or two, said, "I wish you would ask your mamma to come here—no one can explain all

this so well as herself." Again the vexed Almeria felt compliance to be unavoidable, and obeyed.

"What a strange collection!" said Clara, pointing to one or two prints, most ludicrously incongruous. Sir George smiled. "By the way, papa," she added in a whisper, "I have just acquired an important piece of information.—It is that quiet-looking girl, Marianne, who has the independent fortune. I have heard a number of various reports about it, but my present information comes from the best possible authority, being no other than the young lady herself."

"Are you in earnest, Clara?"

"Yes, perfectly—she has been quite opening her heart to me, and told me that she was engaged to be married to her cousin as soon as he had taken orders."

"How devilish hot the room is!—don't you find it so? You don't mean to stay here all night, I suppose, do you?"

"Not quite, papa.—But I must not go away yet."

"No, I suppose not. The carriage is waiting, is it not?"

"I believe so. The servants know that they are always to wait here."

"Then it shall take me down to my club, and come back directly for you.—You need not say any thing about my having bolted." Clara bent her fair head in acquiescence; Sir George glided very skilfully behind a group surrounding a tray of ices, and when Almeria returned with her mother, Miss Meddows stood before the Miltonic table alone.

"Have I not got on amazingly since you saw it last, my dear Miss Meddows?" demanded Mrs. Gibson.

"You have indeed. The work is swelling into most magnificent dimensions," replied Clara, hardly able to repress a smile at the restless glances which the forsaken Almeria was throwing round in all directions—and throwing in vain.

"There is a great deal of original humour in this idea, Miss Meddows," said Mrs. Gibson, taking up a little etching that lay upon the table. "This was Mr. Dalrymple's idea. You see it is the breaking up of the school at Dotheboy's hall—Nicholas Nickleby, you know—and Mr. Dalrymple advises me of all things to make it illustrate the rebellion of the angels. The idea is admirable. Every body is delighted with it."

Poor Clara took up the little print, and looked at it with a most wavering degree of attention; whereupon Mr. Gibson ventured to join himself to the party, bringing Charles with him, whom, as only a third or fourth-rate lion on this very splendid evening, he had ventured to seize upon, and initiate into all the Gibson superiorities, in every branch of art, science, and, as he comprehended

sively expressed it, every species of intellectual development. Clara had now to endure hearing the whole history of the illustration of *Paradise Lost* chronologically recorded to Charles Chesterfield by Mr. Gibson, and commented upon with very copious annotations by Mrs. Gibson; but one or two novices happily joining themselves to the group, Clara ventured to return to her place by Marianne.

“I never shrink from doing what I think is right,” said that very odd person again, making room for her—“and I think that it is very likely you adopt the same rule.—Here is another paper portrait for you if you feel inclined to look at it.”

Meanwhile, Mrs. Sherbourne, greatly favoured by circumstances, and deeply intent upon obtaining her object, suffered not the golden opportunity to be wasted, but as soon as Mrs. Gibson was called away, so completely and ably brought all her artillery to play on the vanity and sundry other fine feelings of Mr. Marchmont, that he speedily found himself consoled for the escapade of Miss Meddows, and devoted himself to the poetess quite as much as he thought it likely his invaluable friend Mrs. Gibson would approve.

“May I hope that you will condescend to call on me, Mr. Marchmont?” said Mrs. Sherbourne, when the party was beginning to disperse; and she said it with a look and tone of such touching gentleness, that few men could have avoided replying as he did.—“Will I? good Heaven, what a question! Tell me where I may find you?”

The answer was a silent one, and consisted in her slipping into his hand a card bearing her address. This done, she too glided amidst the crowd, and disappeared.

Charles Chesterfield during the whole of this time had never for a moment the fate of his tale out of his thoughts, but till the departure of Mrs. Sherbourne he had not found courage to approach the patron upon whom his destiny hung. At length, however, after she had left the room he made a desperate effort, for his anxiety was literally greater than he could bear, and breaking away from Mr. Gibson, Mrs. Gibson, three Miss Gibsons, and all the glories of their “*Paradise Lost*,” he made his way to the sofa on which Mr. Marchmont was now lying, apparently half asleep, and said to him—

“Well, sir—do you think it will do?”

“Who?—what, my dear fellow?” returned the startled philosopher, rubbing his eyes—“What in the world are you talking about?”

“The story I gave you this morning, Mr. Marchmont.—Will you give it a place in *The Regenerator*?”

“Upon my word that is a question I cannot answer, Chesterfield—for I have not looked at it.”

A man must be as vain as our poor Charles Chesterfield to suffer all he did at that moment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Sherbourne pours Balm into Charles's Wounds—An Interview between Mr. Marchmont and Mrs. Sherbourne—Poetry of the Nineteenth Century.

NOT even the last words of Mrs. Sherbourne, though they were all that his heart could wish, had the power of healing the wound which Charles had received from the negligent answer of Marchmont; yet they were very delightful words too, and doubtless produced a salutary effect, though far short of a cure.

Having just strength sufficient to hear Mr. Marchmont's answer without falling to the ground, he wisely determined not to tax the over-strained nerves any longer, and without attempting any reply, instantly turned round and left the room.

Mrs. Sherbourne, who had prevailed on a servant to go out and seek a coach for her, was still waiting for it at the door of the dining-parlour, enveloped in a huge domino, sort of cloak which she had brought with her from Rome. Poor Charles neither noticed nor knew her, but, though she had found it impossible to give him more than a nod while in the presence of the great editor,—the fate-bestowing WE of *The Regenerator*,—she seemed quite enchanted to meet him now, and, stretching out her little hand, gently arrested his rapid steps.

“Do not fly away at such a rate till I have spoken one word to you,” she said. “Remember! the rehearsal is fixed for Friday next. I cannot ask you to come to see me before that day, as I shall be greatly occupied, but if you will call for me at eleven—perhaps you will bring a coach with you—we can go to the theatre together, and it will be a great comfort to me to have your support during the trying scene. You have no notion, I am sure, of the torture to which the performers put one on these occasions! Ah! Mr. Chesterfield! our profession is certainly the noblest in the world! But it sometimes brings tremendous agitation!”

These words sounded like the voice of an oracle upon the ears of Charles, and brought all the valuable consolation which could be derived from knowing that in the noble brother and sisterhood to which he belonged there might be more hearts than one as troubled and trembling as his own. Somewhat cheered, and at any rate deeply grateful, Charles not only promised to be faithfully punctual to the delightful appointment which she proposed,

but, gallantly offering his arm, stood beside her till her vehicle arrived, and handed her into it with a sort of careful tenderness which proved that, notwithstanding his troubles, he had not forgotten his visit to her little parlour in Mount-street.

We will not, in pity to the reader, follow poor Charles to his anxious restless bed. Suffice it to say that he passed an extremely bad night, and, falling asleep towards the morning, dreamed such a feverish quantity of literary adventures, and misadventures, that he awoke pale, unrefreshed, and most utterly miserable. During the day he took at least four-and-twenty different walks, never choosing to be absent from his lodgings for many minutes together, lest a note from Mr. Marchmont might come in the interval, yet loathing the sight of pens, ink, and paper too heartily to permit his making use of them. Nay, he loathed the sight of a book too. It created a painful emotion of envy towards the author, *for it was printed*.

While this miserable day thus wore away with Charles, his mighty master was probably employing his time in a much more amusing manner than if he had devoted it to the critical perusal of the poor youth's *première tentative*. Quite as early as it is usual for literary ladies to be ready for morning visits, Mr. Marchmont was at Mrs. Sherbourne's door. To say the truth, she had been for some time anxiously watching for his approach, an occupation for which a parlour window gives great facilities; and the moment she perceived him present himself at the door of the house, she flew to that of her parlour, and uttered, in rapid but distinct accents to the maid, as she passed to open it, "Let this gentleman in; but if any body else calls before he goes away, say that I am out."

The morning toilet of Mrs. Sherbourne has already been described as *bien soignée*, and exceedingly attractive, even on ordinary occasions, and it was certainly rather more so than usual now: indeed, to a woman *à prétention*—and Mrs. Sherbourne was pre-eminently such in every sense of the phrase—no visit is more likely to excite a careful preparation than that of the editor of a critical journal, himself still received by way of a young man, still *garçon*, and still *fat*.

Mrs. Sherbourne knew perfectly well what she was about, nor must the slightest approach to indiscretion be attributed to her. On the contrary, whatever she did on this occasion, and on many others, which by the ignorant might have been thought to have that appearance, deserved to be described by an epithet very decidedly the reverse. But Mrs. Sherbourne would as soon have thought of putting her impassioned language, her original views on all subjects, her boasted knowledge of Italian, or any other

of her manifold accomplishments, upon the shelf as her beauty. Her prose and poetry, her hands and feet, her wit, and her white shoulders, her philosophy and her long ringlets, her large eyes and her little Italian vocabulary, were one and all part and parcel of herself, and one and all part and parcel “of that by which she lived.”

“This is so kind!—so very kind, Mr. Marchmont!” she said, as the gentleman entered, “bowed upon her hand,” and expressed his hopes that his early visit did not derange her occupations.

“My occupations? Alas! What occupation can you attribute to me that I should weigh against the pleasure of seeing you? In your position, Mr. Marchmont, you know not what it is to feel as I do. Shall I pity you? I think I will, for never knowing the delight felt by the hopeless and forlorn, when a cheering ray of light shines upon them from—*above*.”

Mrs. Sherbourne pronounced the last word with a pretty playful smile, and with an action of her delicate hand, which, though it a little deranged her slippery shawl, made her look altogether exceedingly graceful and animated.

“Good Heaven! Mrs. Sherbourne! How is it that I have lived thus long, and never known you till now? There is treason somewhere, and I must hunt it out. The herd, the envious herd have plotted to keep us asunder, or we must have met!” exclaimed Marchmont, looking at her with a little real, and an immense deal of pretended, admiration. “May I sit by you here?” he said, still holding her hand, and leading her towards the sofa.

“You may,” she replied in an accent difficult to describe, but which expressed at once timidity, confidence, incipient friendship, and that sort of pretty consciousness which gives to some ladies the air of a mouse, incessantly expecting to be pounced upon by a cat, but one for whom, by some strange perversity of their nature, they cannot feel all the detestation it ought to inspire.

“Well now, tell me,” said Mr. Marchmont, protectingly, “what is all this I hear about a play of yours that is going to be immediately brought out? Has this little hand been really bold enough to trace the exits and the entrances, the good and evil, the passion and the whim of life, through five long acts? What an extraordinary creature you are!”

“Oh! do not say so! It seems so like laughing at me! But what *can* I do? Alas! you know not my position. Woe is me, Mr. Marchmont, I must do something or perish.”

“Perish the universe first,” replied her visiter, with enthusiasm. “But why,” he added, “should you speak with regret of having been induced to exercise your charming genius upon the

very highest order of poetical composition? It is a glory even to have thought of it."

"But oh! the presumption! If you could but imagine the fluttering *here!*" she replied, pressing her hands upon her bosom, "I am quite sure you would pity me."

"Pity!—My charming Mrs. Sherbourne! Pity is a feeling you can never inspire, though many an aching heart may wish you to feel it. You know this, you must know it, only too well. But tell me frankly—can I be of any use to you?"

Mrs. Sherbourne understood her business a great deal too well, and had a vast deal too much tact to reply, "Yes, sir. Be so good as to say, before it appears, that the world are standing tip-toe to witness the first dramatic effort of decidedly the most talented woman in Europe. And afterwards—that years have passed by us, and many more will roll after them, without producing a dramatic work so replete with all the best and highest attributes of that order of composition." She did not say this; she only gave him one flash from her large eyes, that seemed vivified by a ray of hope divine, and then throwing herself forward on her little writing-table, she remained silent for a minute or two, and appeared to be weeping, for such windy "suspuration of forced breath" burst from her fair breast, that it was evident she was strongly agitated, and, in all human likelihood, shedding tears.

"Dear friend! let me call you so," said Marchmont, taking her hand; "what is all this? You must not be so nervous. The representation of a first play is, I grant you, a tremendous trial of strength, even for a man, and he must have an iron heart, who would not sympathize with such a being as you are, under the same thrilling experiment! I know it all, I guess every feeling that is now working within you. But look up—look up at me, I entreat you! If you imagine I have power, imagine too—nay, do more than imagine, be very sure—that it shall be stretched to the utmost to do you service. Will not this assurance induce you to look at me once more? Come, come, I will positively see you smile again."

"What an ungrateful wretch I should be if I did not look up!" exclaimed Mrs. Sherbourne suddenly raising her head, shaking back her ringlets, and passing her hand over her eyes, as if both literally to dash away any idle drops that might obscure them, and figuratively to send off the heavy cloud that had rested on her spirit.

"Oh, Heaven!" she went on, clasping her hands together, and piercing the ceiling with her upward gaze; "if, if, IF I could indulge the wild hope that this drama might appear tolerable to

you, I should cast care and sorrow to the winds, and feel at once the proudest and happiest of human beings."

"Mrs. Sherbourne," replied Marchmont, solemnly, "I do not believe that there is any man in my profession who has the same highly-exalted conscientious feeling about it that I have. My critical articles, down even to the most trifling notices, are written with the most scrupulous and perfectly unbiassed impartiality; neither personal nor party feelings have the slightest share in any word I write; and so deeply important do I think this impartiality to the cause of literature, than I am often made perfectly wretched by perceiving that I am the only individual who acts upon this principle. So far it is due to myself, that I should explain my principles as editor, proprietor, and leading writer of decidedly the most popular journal in Europe. It is a position of immense responsibility, and it is the glory of my life to fill it worthily. But having eased my conscience by stating this fairly to you, let me go on to say that I am quite confident you have no cause to fear. I have not exercised this perilous calling for so long a time, my charming Mrs. Sherbourne, without having acquired a power almost prophetic, concerning the production of those with whom I converse. Methinks I hear and feel the different scenes of your drama upon my heart! I know what it must be, nor do I fear to compromise myself unsafely, by assuring you that it shall be very favourably reviewed."

It would be long before a lady not professionally obliged to look thankful could have called up into her countenance such a prodigious assemblage of grateful feelings as now employed the features of Mrs. Sherbourne; neither were words wanting, though they were short, broken, and agitated.

"I bless you!" said she in a voice that trembled like the silver chord of an unstrung lute (to borrow a phrase of her own); "and, alas! my blessing, my prayers, are all that I have left to give. Oh, Mr. Marchmont! you know not the trembling weakness of the insect you would save from perishing. One hostile word from you would act upon my very existence, like water shot at the poor humming-bird, which, light though it be, crushes its gossamer wing, and stills its feeble sound for ever!"

"Mrs. Sherbourne!" exclaimed the great critic in a voice of rapture, "as I hope to live, you are the most poetical creature I have met with for a century. You must work out that thought for my paper—it is quite beautiful. Do not shake your head as much as to say I must not flatter you—I never do flatter any body, and I believe in my soul that to flatter *you* would be impossible. You may always trust me, my charming friend; for I never say any thing which I do not think, nor even think any thing which

is not just and true. You may trust my heart for the first, and my head for the last, without danger of being disappointed in either."

"Good Heaven! what a privilege it is to listen to you!" replied Mrs. Sherbourne. "Let me but see you often enough, and my mind will be corrected of unnumbered failings which now beset it. What is now all weakness would be nurtured into strength."

"Yet I think it would be a great pity to change your mind from what I now find it," he returned, looking at her with very evident admiration. "If you see me often, it will be rather because I wish to study you as you are, than from any inclination to make you different. I wish I had the privilege of ransacking that delicate little desk, Mrs. Sherbourne," he added, playfully drawing it towards him, and pretending to raise the lid, already somewhat open, from the recess below having more papers in it than it could well contain; "may I?"

"Would that there were aught within that lid that you could think worthy for a moment to detain your eye!" she replied, with a gentle sigh. "But no! you would seek in vain."

"Then you confess there is *something* there that might be read!" said he, "though nothing that you deem worth reading."

"Oh, yes! there is abundance there, written in a tolerably legible character, if that were all required to make it worthy of notice," was her answer.

"And supposing I should say that it was all I required, provided the hand which traced the characters were your own, would that suffice to procure me a sight of it?" demanded Marchmont, rather tenderly. Say, may I go further? Tell me, tell me."

"I should answer that you were at liberty to read any composition there, provided it were finished. It would be idle to give you a few lines only, thrown off perhaps in a moment of agitation, which calmer reason sufficed the next moment to quell. Do not ask me to do this, and I will refuse you nothing else that is there," she replied.

"You shall yourself select for me," he said.

Snatching a handful of her ever rebellious shawl, and once more covering one of her shoulders with it, Mrs. Sherbourne silently set to work to obey him; and languidly drawing the little desk towards her, she began with the tips of her pretty fingers to turn over the different scraps which it contained in the most graceful manner imaginable.

"Alas!" she said, shaking her head, as one after another she set them aside as unworthy the critic's eye, "they are every one of them the record of some strong paroxysm of feeling, which were better perhaps forgotten than remembered. But here is one

that I sometimes love to look upon ; and, shall I own the truth, to weep over ; for it recalls a rush of emotion that almost took the force of inspiration. Ah ! Mr. Marchmont ! if you wish to look into my very soul, read this."

Marchmont extended his hand to receive the paper, and gallantly kissed that which presented it. He then read the title aloud, "The Moon-stricken One's Monody."

"Pretty ! very pretty ! My dearest Mrs. Sherbourne, grant me one favour more—read these lines to me yourself?"

"I will if I can, but I almost doubt my strength." Then shaking back her ringlets, suffering her shawl to fall unchecked, and fixing her eyes on some object unquestionably outside the walls of her little parlour, she began :

THE MOON-STRICKEN ONE'S MONODY.

A lay for the Lady Moon ! Lady of light,
All pellucid and lonely, why wanders thy ray ?
Why, wan, weary, woe-begone queen of the night,
Why shunn'st thou the brilliance and splendour of day ?
Ah ! who shall say ?

Yet, as palely thou paces thy path through the sky,
Thy loved light illumines one worshipper true ;
And, oh ! how ecstatic to think none but I
Am awake here below, and above none but you,
In the welkin blue.

When midnight in murkiness mars the sky's vault,
And their rage by dread murmurs the elements mark,
Blood, murders, and massacres—not my own fault—
Throng thick through my brain, and my soul is all dark—
While watch-dogs bark !

But when tempests are hush'd, and in glory serene
Thou reign'st, Lady Moon, in the welkin once more,
A balmy tranquillity steals o'er the scene,
And the storm in my fluttering bosom is o'er.
Thine evermore !

Then fancy-fed poesy wells forth in song,
And meanders untaught into lunatic lays ;
Elysium ecstasies whirl me along,
And intellect soars above pedantry's gaze,
'Mid the stormy maze !

Hail, hallucinations ! Bright visions of love
Envelop my soul with creations of light !
Ineffable essences flutter above,
And flood my fond feelings with flame in their flight,
Through the depths of night.

'T was thus a Moon-stricken One sigh'd forth her tale ;
Then meekly to Destiny bow'd her fair head ;
And while one rebel tear dew'd her cheek cold and pale,
"Make my grave 'neath the moonbeam ! There lay me," she said,
"There—there make my bed !"

Nothing can be conceived more touchingly sweet and solemn than Mrs. Sherbourne's manner of reading these lines ; but when she reached the two last, her voice failed her, and had not Mr. Marchmont sat near enough to have read the page as it dropped upon her knee, he must have lost them ; for the " rebel tear " of which she sang sprang unbidden to her eye, and drowned its own harmonious record ere it was spoken !

" Matchless minstrel ! " exclaimed the critic in a tone of passionate admiration ; " when you would bribe your reviewer, fail not to read your productions to him yourself. No being of mortal mould can resist it. The lines are delicious, but the delivery of them was divine ! My dear Mrs. Sherbourne," he added, picking up the fallen leaf, " let me have a memorial of this hour ! Give me these lines ! Upon my soul I cannot part with them ! "

Mrs. Sherbourne could not instantly make up her mind as to what she had better do, and she skilfully placed her embroidered pocket-handkerchief before her eyes while she hesitated. In truth, the question before her was not altogether an easy one. It very rarely happened that Mrs. Sherbourne, even in her most fascinating flirtations, forgot that the first great object in life, after five and thirty, is the *wherewithal* by which all that she most loved and liked was to be obtained. It was not therefore very likely that this wherewithal should escape her memory at the present moment ; for it so happened that she thought the great master one of the ugliest fellows she had ever beheld, and would as soon have thought of giving away one of her rhapsodies to the first black-muzzled mastiff she met in the street, as to him. But he was a reviewer ; one of the omnipotent *we*, a member of the secret tribunal, in whose frown there was death, and whose smile brought food, lodging, hackney-coaches, and satin-gowns. So she withdrew her handkerchief, looked up into his face with a delightful smile, and said,

" Do with me as you will, my most kind friend ! I am only afraid that you know too well the pleasure with which I yield to your request. But you are too generous to despise me for it—I know you are ! "

Mr. Marchmont answered her with one of the most grateful smiles that he ever produced ; and uttering something about that day's having opened to him a new era in his existence, hastily took his leave, in order to transcribe her charming lines in time for the press that was already at work upon the next number of *The Regenerator*.

CHAPTER XIX.

Country Correspondents—Inspiration—Kindness of Sir George Meddows—A Rehearsal—Disappointment.

By return of post, Charles Chesterfield received answers to the two letters he had despatched to Maplebury; and by a movement which had more of feeling than reflection in it, he opened that of Bessy's first, and read as follows:

“DEAR CHARLES,—I think your last letter has done me a great deal of good. It was not very long, to be sure; but somehow or other I found out a great deal in it. First, I found out that you are very well pleased and contented at being where you are; and that must of course make your friends pleased and contented too. And next I found out that you were become a great man, which I remember of old that you had a great fancy for, and therefore this must make you very happy also; so here again was something to make your friends rejoice. The next thing I found out was, that it would be very foolish for me to go on expecting that you would write me long letters, when you have more learned business on your hands than you can possibly get through; and so that, you know, will prevent my being disappointed any more. Your little friend, Charles, will therefore try for the future to give her mind to her dairy and her flowers, and not trouble herself any more about this great London, which, as you truly say, she can know nothing at all about. And now good bye, dear Charles.

“If my letter is too long I hope you will not have read it, but just go at once to the end of it, and find that I write myself what I am quite sure that I shall ever be,

“Your affectionate friend,

“ELIZABETH PARNELL.”

“It is lucky, at any rate,” said the young author, folding up this epistle, and throwing it to some distance from him across the table—“it is lucky at any rate, that I don't think this silly ignorant little girl quite so charming a person as I used to do; for it is clear enough that she does not trouble herself about me. Well! it is all just as it ought to be. She is born for her dairy, and I for *The Regenerator*. She and her flowers will vegetate together at Maplebury, and I and my pen will live together in London. Now then for Mr. Westbrook.”

He opened the letter, rather fearing that he should find it exceedingly long, but almost started on perceiving that it was, on the contrary, exceedingly short. It ran thus:

“DEAR CHARLES CHESTERFIELD,—My intellectual darkness is

such as to render me quite incapable of comprehending your letter, and I really will not ask you to write any more till you can be what you call 'more explicit.' The only part of your despatch intelligible to me is that wherein you inquire about my cat. She is very well, I thank you: and perhaps if she had passed as much time as you have in the great emporium that you talk of, she might have been sufficiently propelled forward to join her kind regards to mine.

"I am, dear Charles Chesterfield, your hearty well-wisher,
"RICHARD WESTBROOK."

Charles knit his brows. He did not throw the letter from him as he had done that of Bessy; but read it again with a wish to discover what it was which made the manner of it so particularly disagreeable to him.

"I shall write to him no more," he said. "Ignorance is bad enough at all times, but where it is joined with—with—with impertinence," he muttered at length, "it is intolerable."

Yet after he had found the word, it did not quite please him. The notion of his calling any thing that the so-lately venerated Mr. Westbrook could say to him "impertinent," had something so monstrous in it, that he felt as ill at ease as if he had been made to stand upon his head, or placed in any other unnatural position. Yet he was in no humour to force his worse nature into making the *amende* to his better one; and thus he remained, with that sort of battle going on within him, which is as uncomfortable to the moral part of the system, as some digestive insolubilities to the physical.

How the struggle might have ended if he had been left perfectly to himself cannot be known; for while he still held the letter clasped, by no means affectionately, in his hand, yet still feeling some troublesome recollections, pricking, as it were, at his heart, the postman's always-exciting knock was again heard, and another letter delivered to him the moment after.

This was from Mr. Marchmont, and contained only the following lines.

"DEAR SIR,—I shall print it in the next number. Let this encourage you—and let me have about a dozen pages more in any style you will, by the one after. If you can excite yourself a little, and knock me off a few spirited stanzas upon Love, or Liberty, or any other theme of a popular kind, they shall appear likewise.

"Yours faithfully,

"MARCHMONT.

"P.S. If you find it necessary you are quite at liberty to put on the golden spurs."

Here was a panacea for all his disagreeable feelings at once. Bessy, Mr. Westbrook, Mablebury, Charlton, the whole wide world and all the beings in it, were by this brilliant burst of light and joy thrown so completely into the shade, that his mind remained scarcely conscious of their existence.

“Long looked for, come at last!” he exclaimed, starting up, and clasping his hands together in ecstasy. “Never, no never again, will I torture myself, as I have done since last Tuesday. The die is cast then, and the hazard won! Excite myself! Gracious heaven! Am I not excited? Thou art the elixir, Marchmont, that can rouse my spirit best. Yet will I not neglect any other that may be within my reach.”

While thinking or speaking thus, Charles arranged all his implements for writing, and having rung the bell, and ordered that he was on no account to be disturbed, he locked his door, took off his cravat, pushed up his hair from his forehead, following very nearly the style of arrangement in this respect which he had observed in Lord Byron’s portraits, though, to do him justice, without greatly thinking what he was about; and then throwing himself forward over his desk, his right hand holding his pen, and his left supporting his forehead, he felt very nearly as much inspired as he could wish.

As far as rhyming went, Charles really and truly had very uncommon facility, and this did him good service now; for as fast as the riot rout of discordant thoughts and images, so readily generated in a young brain, rose up before him, they were booked in lines of ten syllables each with the most pungent delight, and very little trouble, if any.

“This it is to be inspired!” exclaimed the young man. “Gracious Heaven, how these verses flow! Thought seems my slave and poetry my handmaid! Marchmont, dear Marchmont! this do I owe to thee! How do I bless thee for it!”

It would be vain to attempt following in prose a state of mind so pre-eminently poetical. From this time, till about six o’clock in the afternoon, he continued writing with little intermission, and then he felt so completely exhausted, not in mind, but in body, that he recollected with very considerable satisfaction that he was to dine in Bruton-street at seven. Never before had the restorative materials of the baronet’s table appeared so attractive to his imagination; a feeling, by the way, in itself truly poetical.

Meanwhile he looked at his own table, covered with sheets of paper, all more or less filled with short and long lines, with inexpressible satisfaction.

“He asked me for one poem, and I have already composed seven!” thought he. “He shall choose among them, and may

think, perhaps, that he has found a pupil not quite unworthy of him! Great Heaven! What glorious proof of fecundity is here! Nature, I thank thee!"

Notwithstanding the exhaustion of which he was sensible, he appeared in Sir George Meddows's drawing-room with a look of greater animation than he had ever before worn there. Poor Clara still remembered her uncourteous dismissal of him a few days before, in a very penitent spirit, and, though neither well nor happy, exerted herself to converse with him.

The tone in which he replied to her was so animated and unembarrassed, that Mrs. Longuéville looked up with much the same expression of surprise on her elegantly languid countenance, which it might have worn had she heard a cat bark, or a dog mew, and she turned upon her less observant brother a glance that said plainly enough "What can this mean?"

The family had no guest at dinner, save Charles; and when the ladies withdrew, Sir George himself became so much struck with the change, that instead of saying as he had repeatedly done before, "Now, Charles, you may be off if you like it; don't stand on any ceremony with me—of course you do not wish to sit and drink wine." Instead of this, he now said,

"You must tell me what you have been about, Charles. I am quite sure some good luck has happened to you. What is it? you must have no reserves with me, my dear boy."

"You are quite right, Sir George," replied the *protégé*; "I certainly have been the most fortunate fellow in the world in having been introduced to Mr. Marchmont. I certainly do feel myself at this moment to be one of the most fortunate men in the world."

"Mr. Marchmont! and who the devil is Mr. Marchmont, Chesterfield?" demanded Sir George, with something like a sneer.

A feeling, certainly not far removed from contempt, produced a smile in return upon the lips of Charles.

"Mr. Marchmont, Sir George," he replied, "is the editor and principal writer of *The Regenerator*." And here he made a full stop very pregnant with meaning.

"*The Regenerator*? Oh, ay, that's one of the monthlies, isn't it? A little in the rawhead-and-bloody-bones Radical line, I've a notion. But that matters not a pin's head, Charles, if you can get money out of him. Has he engaged you to write for his mag.?"

"Yes, Sir George, I am happy to say he has," returned the proud young man.

"I am devilish glad to hear it, my dear boy. And what has he agreed to give you? You must stand up for a good price, remember that. What is he to give you, Charles, for every page

you write? I don't understand very much about the kind of thing; but I suppose you are paid by the quantity. How much shall you be able to get by the week, my dear fellow? Be sure to get ready money, mind that. How much will it come to by the week, Charles?"

"I have made no calculation, sir," replied Charles, colouring.

"No! That is not by any means a good way of doing business, I promise you. It does not require to be an Apollo in order to perceive that, Charles. But if you have made no calculation as to the exact sum, which you may be able to get just at first, I presume you know something of Mr. Regenerator's price current, don't you? I presume you know what his terms generally are, and that will enable you to calculate."

"No, indeed, Sir George, I do not. I know nothing about his terms."

"Is that because you are too shy to ask him, Charles, or because you are too young and boy-like to have given any thought to the matter at all?" demanded the baronet, gravely.

"I do not think it is owing either to the one or to the other, sir," replied the young man with some spirit. "I know that if I continue to devote myself to literature, and continue to be successful, it is reasonable to suppose that I shall make money by it; I have thought enough on the subject to know that. And as to my being too shy to speak to Mr. Marchmont on any subject, I think that can hardly be, since I have found courage to speak to him concerning my own compositions—a theme which I must conceive to be more embarrassing than any other."

Though this was said with downcast eyes, and a particularly demure and modest look, Sir George failed not to detect something of professional *cliqueism* in it, which a little disgusted him, and he was on the very verge of pouring forth a volley of lively ridicule upon authors, and authorlets, when he suddenly changed his mind, and filling his own glass, and pushing the claret to his companion, said instead,

"My dear Chesterfield! You have no idea how I love and honour you for the sentiments by which I perceive that you are actuated. Your language convinces me, that however much your faculties may be occupied on that most ennobling of all pursuits—literature, you nevertheless, have found time to remember that it ought to be a source of profit, as well as of honour, to its professors. But, at the same time, I read in your very heart of hearts, my dear fellow, that your soul is of too generous a nature ever to be degraded by that vilest of all passions, the love of money. God forbid that any thing should ever occur to poison your mind on this point. I know the world, my dear boy, better

perhaps than most men, and all my experience has gone to teach me that no human being was ever capable of conceiving or of doing any thing great who had not a generous contempt for mere pecuniary considerations. An open hand and a yielding heart are the invariable concomitants of genius, as much as a suspicious temper and niggardly disposition are the reverse; and nothing under heaven could persuade me that a young fellow over anxious about money would ever become an author of celebrity."

Charles listened to this harangue with great admiration and respect. He entertained a little private suspicion that Sir George Meddows was not much of a reading man, but he looked up to him as a person of high fashion, and consummate knowledge of the world, and the opinions he now pronounced made, as they were intended to do, a very strong and lasting impression on his mind, and indeed greatly raised his opinion of the speaker.

"Indeed, Sir George, I believe you are quite right," he replied; "and it is a great pleasure to me to hear that such is your opinion, because it teaches me not to mistrust my own. I do think that the love of money is a most degrading passion."

"That is just like you, Charles. That is just like your usual acuteness and good sense. But I must prove to you, my dear fellow, that I don't preach what I would not practise. It will be some time yet before you will be in possession of your fortune. Let me lend you some money, Charles; I am sure you must want it."

Young Chesterfield coloured, but it was with gratitude and pleasure. He had been for some days considerably tormented by his doubts as to the best manner of confessing to his father, that notwithstanding all Sir George Meddows's excessive kindness, he still found it was absolutely necessary that he should chiefly live at his own expense. This he knew had not been contemplated by his family when he left home, and he was terribly afraid that when it was communicated to his father, together with a petition for a loan to supply his wants till he became of age, he should be told in reply that the best thing he could do would be to return home. To be enabled to avoid this much-dreaded communication, therefore, was the greatest benefit that could be conferred on him, and his gratitude for it was in proportion to the relief it brought. Like all other young people suddenly become possessed of money, but who have had no practical means of ascertaining its relative value, his idea of the wealth he was about to possess was most absurdly disproportioned to the reality, and accordingly he felt no shadow of anxiety at the idea of forestalling a portion of it; he eagerly replied, therefore, and with much less embarrassment than might have been expected,

“I am very much obliged to you, indeed, Sir George, and I won't deny that I shall be exceedingly glad to have a little money advanced me, between this time and December, without troubling my father about it.”

“That's right, Charles; I love you for your frankness. What is the good of having a friend unless he is ready and willing to help us in time of need? How much should you like to have, my dear boy? Ask freely, and without the slightest hesitation.”

“Why, a hundred pounds, Sir George, would, I should think, be enough for every thing, tailor's bill and all.”

“Then a hundred pounds you shall have. Come with me at once into the library, and I will write you a check for it. I am quite delighted, Chesterfield, that it came into my head to offer it.”

The whole of this transaction made a deep impression on Charles. It not only relieved him from a great anxiety, but the manner in which it was done was so pleasant, and amiable, as to create a degree of affection infinitely greater than he had ever expected to feel for Sir George Meddows.

It seemed at this time as if all things conspired to make the young adventurer happy. His purse was full of money; he had made many invaluable acquaintances; Sir George was all kindness; Clara all sweetness and condescension; and he was quite certain that he should see his own composition in print before many days were over.

The next morning rose upon him with the agreeable recollection that he was to call upon Mrs. Sherbourne, and go with her to the rehearsal of her play. Without troubling Mr. Dalrymple's valet, or any body else, Charles had already found his way to the pit of one of the great theatres, and experienced all the wonder and all the enjoyment which ever attends a first theatrical exhibition to a young and imaginative person. When people grow older, and what is commonly called wiser, they know that if any portion of this sort of mystical pleasure is to be felt again, the machinery by which it is brought about, from the *Prima Donna* down to the contrivance which produces moonlight, must be seen, only as it is intended to be seen; but with Charles, there was still all the eager curiosity attendant upon the development of mystery, to make him long for a literal peep behind the scenes, and independent of all authorial, gallant, and sentimental reasons for enjoying the idea of this expedition, he had over and above the irrepressible delight of a boy.

He found Mrs. Sherbourne, not exactly ready, but ready to get ready as soon as he should arrive.

“How can I thank you enough for this amiable attention?” she said. “Dear Mr. Chesterfield! Do you not feel for me? Can you not imagine the sort of suffocating *battement de cœur* that is besetting me?” and she took his hand and pressed it for a moment to her bosom.

“Oh! yes!” returned Charles, colouring, “I can indeed! Man though I be, I think I should feel almost as nervous as you do under the same circumstances; and yet, Mrs. Sherbourne, I envy you too! What is there I would not give to see a play written by me performed at Covent Garden or Drury Lane? Yes, Mrs. Sherbourne, I envy you.”

“Dear Chesterfield! Do you really? It is to be sure an elevated and extremely exciting position. The idea of having hundreds of one’s fellow-creatures hanging as it were upon one’s thoughts, and waiting breathless for the events created by one’s will, has something unspeakably agitating in it. But your turn will come soon, Chesterfield. I have no doubt in the world that you will eventually devote yourself to the stage. It is in my estimation the last, the best, the highest employment of human genius! Will you mix for me a few drops, about a table-spoonful perhaps, of that red lavender which stands there? And when I have swallowed it, I shall be ready to attend you. Thank Heaven that I have a hand, gentle as yours, to minister to me at this tremendous moment!”

Charles performed the operation very carefully, and the fair poetess, after swallowing the dose, put the final pin into her everlasting shawl, and murmured, “Now, then, I am ready!”

Before, however, they had made two steps in advance, she withdrew her arm from that of her *chevalier*, exclaiming—

“Oh, Heavens! I am lost if I go without my pencil and note-book. Stop one moment! I dare say I shall find them in one or other of these drawers.” Upon which a search was commenced, which rendered that popular illustration of confusion, a needle in a bottle of hay, tame and spiritless in comparison to it. Pins, needles, reels of cotton, scissors, penknives, skeins of silk, scraps of ribbon, scraps of lace, and scraps of sticking-plaster, a miniature volume of Moore, much worn, a little Don Juan, worse still, three flacons of aromatic salts, four broken fans, a prodigious number of *ci-devant* white gloves, half a pair of garters, an empty purse, a pair of slippers, and a small wheelbarrow-full of old curling-papers—speaking eloquently of the frequent and sudden enfranchisement of those lovely natural embellishments, her cherished ringlets, were all tossed out and in successively, with the most unscrupulous vivacity of search, but neither pencil nor note-book could be found.

"This is annihilating!" she exclaimed, stopping at last, and positively out of breath. "Can you conceive any thing so distressing? Imagine my sitting to listen to all these animals reciting what I have written, without the power of making an observation or marking a blunder! I am excessively sorry, Mr. Chesterfield! but my going is perfectly out of the question, unless I can obtain what is necessary for the performance of the office for which I am to go." And, so saying, she took the pin out of her shawl and sat down, with such a look of despair in the eyes which were thrown up towards him, as must have touched any young gentleman's heart in the world.

"For God's sake do not agitate yourself, my dearest Mrs. Sherbourne," said Charles, soothingly. "Cannot I run out and get what will be necessary. Only explain to me what you want, and I am quite sure I shall be able to find it."

"How excessively kind you are!" she replied, with a smile into which all her misery seemed to melt away. "I do not know what I should do without you! Oh, certainly! There is no doubt that you will be able to meet with it at almost any shop in Bond-street. It is not five steps, you know, just across the square. Any thing in the way of tablets will do. Ass's skin, ivory, any thing. Only the pencil must be in a case, I cannot endure the feel of a pencil without a case—but I don't care a straw what it is; silver, gold, plain, or ornamented, whatever you like best, it is all the same to me—only, my dear friend, you must make haste. These creatures, to be sure, are never punctual, that's one comfort, but you really must not linger. Be swift as thought, dear friend."

Charles stayed to hear no more, but was out of sight in a moment; and in wonderfully little time, considering how new he was to the business, he returned with a very elegant set of ivory tablets, and a rich-looking pencil-case, not of gold indeed, but of silver, gilt, elaborately ornamented, and having a fancy seal on the top.

"Now then, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, I hope you will find here what you want." The lady opened the silver paper envelope, and bestowed upon him one of those gratefully reproachful glances in payment, which, though a coin that by the scrutinizing physiognomist may be deemed forgeries, seldom doom the circulator to banishment. It is certain that Charles, when he made the purchase, remembered that he had a hundred pounds, minus the few sovereigns in his pocket, safely locked up in his commode, and the consequence was, that Mrs. Sherbourne was more than pleased, she was delighted—in proof of which, her generous temper not feeling satisfied by the return already made in the above-

mentioned look, led her to draw again upon the same species of property, in which, indeed, her wealth was as boundless as her generosity, and taking up first the little book and then the pencil-case, she impressed a kiss on each, successively. Then silently passing her arm under that of Charles, she led the way to the carriage, into which, after waking the coachman, who had taken advantage of the long interval for the purpose of enjoying a nap, he handed her in, and away they drove at last to the theatre.

For the first few moments of this drive, they were both silent ; Charles not very well knowing what to say, and Mrs. Sherbourne very well knowing that it would be most eloquent to say nothing. But at length, timing the moment skilfully, when the rattle of the windows, the wheels, and the steps were hushed by a stoppage of beer-drays, she broke the silence by a sigh, and then said,

“ Upon my word your being introduced to me just now, Mr. Chesterfield, seems absolutely providential ! You do not yet know half my weakness, you do not yet know how I tremble at the idea of encountering the ill-humour of some, the impertinence of others, and the indifference of all these actors and actresses to whom I am perforce obliged to intrust my reputation in this tremendous experiment. I might hope to fare better, perhaps, could I persuade myself in some degree to court them. But you can have no idea how impossible this would be to me. There is something in my nature that seems to revolt against bestowing a smile, or even a glance of kindness, which is not dictated by my feelings. My heart, my bosom’s lord,” she continued, laying her hand upon her breast, “ is the only potentate from whom my *nuncio* smiles are willing messengers. To no other power will they show obedience. And alas ! for my interest on this, and all other occasions, that heart but rarely recognizes any to whom it wishes to send friendly greeting.”

While the lady was thus talking of her heart, the gentleman began to feel his beating with more than usual quickness, and, without thinking the least in the world what he was about, he took her hand, and exclaimed, “ dearest Mrs. Sherbourne !”

“ Charles !—Mr. Chesterfield !—This must not be !” but just then the vehicle fortunately stopped at the stage door of the theatre, and the coach-door was thrown open by the driver, almost before our hero had time to remark that, notwithstanding Mrs. Sherbourne’s declaration, signifying “ it must not be,” she did not withdraw the imprisoned hand, nor indeed give any other indication of being displeased with him.

Charles, however, was obliged to resign this precious hand in order to get out, which he did with such a mixture of feelings as left him quite unable to make out one from another. It was

Mrs. Sherbourne, and Mrs. Sherbourne's hand, and the theatre, and the prologue, and the actors and the actresses, which were all so mixed up together in his head, as to make him feel exceedingly giddy and queer. Having paid and dismissed the coachman, he hastened to repose himself upon the lady's arm, but found that for the present this happiness was denied him; Mr. Marchmont having arrived nearly at the same moment as the carriage, had immediately taken possession of Mrs. Sherbourne's hand, arm, shawl, and all.

"Oh! Mr. Marchmont!" exclaimed Charles, with evident delight. "How very glad I am to see you! Is not this lucky, Mrs. Sherbourne?"

"Are we got no further than this yet?" mentally ejaculated the accomplished authoress, who rather expected to see Charles change colour and look fierce, at finding her affectionate little arm in possession of another. "But it matters not. There is a time for all things. Perhaps the boy is right."

Marchmont nodded with great condescension and intimacy in return to young Chesterfield's salutation, and notwithstanding the happy occupation of his right arm, held out two fingers appertaining to his left, in order unequivocally to testify his approval and his patronage. They then proceeded altogether into the very inmost recesses of the mysterious fabric, with all the mazes of which Mr. Marchmont appeared to be familiar, Charles following a step behind his companions, marvelling at every thing he saw, and feeling as if the dust beneath his feet were akin to that which of old sullied the sandals of the sacred nine, when wandering upon the sunny heights of their Parnassus. As they were winding their way among sundry masses of trees, prison-chambers, waterfalls, and ball-room decorations, and were in the act of turning a corner, which as yet prevented them from seeing the stage, a violent shout of laughter, proceeding simultaneously from many persons at once, greeted their ears.

"Some gambols are afloat," thought Charles. "Is it Comus's rabble rout that fills the stage? Or it may be that Jonson's learned sock is on, and that the light laugh rises at the rehearsal of his biting wit."

Another step brought him within sight of the group from whom the merry peal had come, and brought him and his party within theirs. Had a gorgon appeared before them, the effect could hardly have been greater. In an instant every sound of mirth was hushed, and the eight or ten very dingy dismal-looking personages from whom it had proceeded stood profoundly silent, and profoundly still before them.

Mrs. Sherbourne now stepped forward, and addressing Mr.

Marvel, who was one of them, said in the most gentle, humble, soothing voice, that mermaid, siren, or woman, could utter,

“I trust, Mr. Marvel, that I have not kept you waiting? you know not the hurry, the agitation I have been in. Such a multitude of people have been with me this morning to inquire when the first representation was to take place, all following so closely one upon the other, as to prevent my having time to order my servant to deny me, that it was perfectly out of my power to come before. Am I greatly beyond my time?”

“I am afraid that some of the ladies have been rather discomposed by the delay,” he replied, with more bluntness than observance; “for myself, madam, the devil a bit do I care where I pass the next three-quarters of an hour, but, beyond that, I beg to observe that wild horses could not hold me here.”

“Alas!” ejaculated the authoress, in very considerable alarm, and secretly wishing that she had not waited for the tablets and pencil-case, pretty though they were. “How shall we be able to do any thing without you, Mr. Marvel? How inexpressibly unfortunate I am! My dearest Mrs. Winterblossom, I hope I see you well. There is such a clamour to know what you are to play! Miss Marksbury, I have been dying to see you! I was in hopes you were coming to call on me, my dear. Good morning, Mr. Crouther! I hope Mrs. Crouther is quite well. Ah! Mrs. Norwood! How excessively kind it is of you to be here! I was so inexpressibly sorry to hear from Mr. Marvel that you were ill! Good morning, Mr. Derment! Isn’t it cold to-day? My dear Miss Angelica Freestone, I dream of nothing, day and night, but your dress in the rainbow scene.—Good Heaven! How beautiful you will look! Mr. Periwinkle here! *quel bonheur!* Then you have condescended, I trust, to play the part of *Sylvio*? Utterly unworthy of your exquisite talent as it is, I yet cannot help feeling a passionate desire that you should play it. Alas! can you wonder at this? My dear Mrs. Motherby, you have really brought your little angels here! How can I thank you enough? I was afraid that they were to be just dressed, and put upon the scene at the last moment, without knowing any thing in the world about it. And their beauty is so exquisite, that I was willing enough to trust to that for the effect. But it will be comparatively more effective with a little instruction; and if they inherit your delicious talent in the melo-dramatic line, and have a little of your instruction beside, I am positive there will not be a dry eye in the house when the royal tyrant seizes on them.”

During the short time that it took Mrs. Sherbourne to make all these little speeches, the following dialogue took place between Mr. Marchmont and his friend Marvel.

"What sort of stuff is it?" demanded the former.

"Execrable!" replied the latter.

"Then why the devil is it to be played?" said Marchmont.

"Why? Why because the Duke of Alonby makes a point of it," answered Marvel.

"Oh! that's it, is it? Then it will run, I dare say," rejoined the critic.

"You must give us a helping hand, you know," said the manager.

"So be it—always remembering, my friend, that—'*Dans le siècle où nous sommes, on ne donne rien pour rien,*'" returned his friend.

"If we forget that moral lesson, you will remind us of it. Marchmont, we may trust you for that, may we not?" returned Marvel, laughing.

"Yes, you may," replied the other, in the same tone, "and it is about the only species of trust that I could conscientiously recommend to you."

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have really no time to lose if this piece is to be rehearsed to-day," said the manager, addressing the party assembled. "I am ready to confess that I am not a gentleman at large, and at liberty to lounge about throughout a whole morning, even among so very charming a party as that at present assembled. I have a great deal of business to do, whatever may be the case with others, and unless the rehearsal begins directly, I cannot be present at it."

As this was not spoken playfully, but, on the contrary, with every appearance of the speaker's being very particularly grave, all the theatrical ladies and gentlemen, without even excepting the angelic little Motherbys, were immediately on the alert; the majority falling back to be ready when wanted; while Mrs. Winterblossom and Mr. Periwinkle, who were to play the first scene, took their places in front.

"You had better take your party into the stage-box, Marchmont," said Mr. Marvel, indicating Mrs. Sherbourne and Chesterfield by a motion of his hand.

Poor Mrs. Sherbourne was in an agony. The idea of her belonging to any body's party on such an occasion, instead of every body belonging to hers, was terrible. There were, in truth, some very annoying symptoms in all that had met her eyes and ears since she entered.

For some particular reasons of his own, of no great public importance, Mr. Marvel was proof against all that poor Mrs. Sherbourne could do, say, look, or sigh, with a view to enchanting him; and it is certain, that nothing, save the influence of the

Duke of Alonby, could have induced him to consent to the reception of her piece. But it is probable that the duke insisted neither upon his flirting with the lady, nor upon any particular etiquette in the manner of her personal reception, and accordingly he seemed not to think it necessary to treat her with any very marked distinction. To resent this in any way was, however, impossible; and, notwithstanding her vexation, she was sufficiently true to herself to retain her charming smile as she took the arm of Mr. Marchmont, and suffered him to lead her, by a door communicating with the stage, into the box pointed out by the manager. Charles silently followed in their train.

It did not take above two minutes to make this transit from the stage to the stage-box; but by the time they were seated, they found Mrs. Winterblossom and Mr. Periwinkle going at full gallop through the first scene.

“ ‘ Remorseless fangs,’ ”
muttered Mrs. Winterblossom.

“ ‘ In vain you plead—
Joys fit for Heaven,’ ”
mumbled Mr. Periwinkle.

“ ‘ What are they about?’ ” demanded the irritated Mrs. Sherbourne, addressing herself to Mr. Marchmont. “ ‘ Do they call this rehearsing?’ ”

“ ‘ Marvel is in a great hurry, you see,’ ” returned the friendly critic, “ ‘ and it will be more for your interest, I think, not to interrupt them. They seem admirably perfect, you may perceive, by the rapidity with which the cue is always taken. That’s a great matter, a very great matter, I assure you.’ ”

“ ‘ Perfect!’ ” exclaimed the unhappy lady; “ ‘ what good is it for me to be here? How am I to judge of the effect? How am I to give any opinion as to the manner in which the different performers sustain their parts? This mummary is most cruel!’ ”

“ ‘ Upon my word,’ ” persisted Marchmont, “ ‘ I would very strongly recommend you not to interrupt them. It will only put them out.’ ”

“ ‘ ‘ Passion unconquer’d, and a will untamed,’ ”
said Mr. Periwinkle, yawning.

“ ‘ Gracious Heaven! May I not hear that speech? May I not be permitted to give an opinion on the meaning given by the performer to the equivocal words before it? This is too, too hard!’ ” and the poor woman, actually forgetting beauty and every thing belonging to it, burst into tears, though, her recollection returning the minute after, she restrained the briny eye-inflaming shower, and only sobbed.

Charles was exceedingly touched, and ventured to say to Mr.

Marchmont, "Would it not be better, sir, to stop them at once, and make them understand that Mrs. Sherbourne is very uneasy at not hearing the speeches given properly. It seems to me perfectly cruel to let them go mumbling on in this way."

"You may go round if you like it, Mr. Chesterfield, and tell them so; but as to its being better to do so, you must excuse me if I do not think it. On the contrary, I know that it would only be running a tremendous risk of offending the whole set at once, manager and all. Trust me, you had better sit still."

"But what must you think of lines given in this way, Mr. Marchmont?" said the mortified and most unhappy poetess. "How can I hope for your support?"

"My dear madam! Let me intreat you not to permit any doubts and fears on that point to disturb your serenity. I should be totally unworthy the friendship with which I flatter myself you intend to honour me, could my conduct be influenced in the slightest degree by such an accident. These good people happen to be in a prodigious hurry this morning, that is all; and you positively must not let it annoy you."

"You are very, very kind! But surely Mr. Marvel is using me very ill. He must let all this go on purposely to annoy and distress me."

"Not the least in the world, believe me. Marvel is the very best good fellow in the universe—only he is occasionally queer—as humoursome as a child—but without another fault."

This assurance afforded but little consolation to Mrs. Sherbourne for her lamentable disappointment. It was, however, all she could get; and after suffering the purgatory of listening to half of some of her best speeches, and a quarter of others gabbled through in the most excruciating manner, she at length heard what she knew to be the last words of the piece, and saw the last of the troop hurry off, leaving the dark dismal stage a mournful type of her own feelings.

Mr. Marchmont rose and opened the box-door, but the unhappy Mrs. Sherbourne seemed unable to follow him, for resting her arms upon the front of the box, and her head upon her arms, she wept in good earnest, and without any sort of affectation whatever.

The philosophical Mr. Marchmont probably thought it was better to give the lady time to recover herself, and took advantage of this unoccupied moment to say to Charles,

"All you want, my young friend, is practice, and a little more boldness in your views. Write on by all means, and let me have every thing you write. You shall have the advantage of my pages as a means of bringing you to the light of day—a proof of real regard and good-will, which I hope you will appreciate

justly. That is right, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne! Look up again! You know how tapestry is made, and what effect is produced by showing the ends and knots of the work upon the side whereon the operator is employed. So is it with the getting up of a play—wait but till the piece is turned the right side outwards, and then all will perceive its glowing colours and beautiful design.”

Having uttered this flourish, he again offered his arm, which was tremblingly accepted, and followed by the thrice-happy Charles, who seemed to walk on air, they again found their way through the chaos from whence springs theatrical creation, and once more found themselves in the street.

“Good Heavens! There is no carriage waiting!” exclaimed Mrs. Sherbourne; “I do not think I could walk to Mount-street, if my life depended upon it! I feel as if I should literally sink into the earth.”

“Can you tell me, Mr. Marchmont, in what direction I can find a stand of coaches?” eagerly demanded Charles, and, after receiving the necessary instructions, he darted off, and returned with the desired vehicle in a few minutes.

But short as was the interval, it was long enough for Mrs. Sherbourne to make an appointment with the gentleman in whose charge she was left, for an early visit on the following morning.

“I would not ask this of you,” she said plaintively, “had I not a communication of some importance to make.”

“Is an apology necessary?” accompanied by a slight pressure of her arm, was the eloquent and only answer, and not another word was uttered on the subject.

“I envy you the office, Chesterfield,” said Mr. Marchmont, as Charles sprang out of the rattling hack; “but I have business with a person who lives close by—and I must not miss the opportunity; so it is you, you very lucky fellow, who must take care of this lady to her lodgings.”

He then handed her in, pressed her hand with an intelligent look, that ratified his promise of waiting on her, gave Charles a friendly nod, and walked off—*quitte pour la peur* of having the coach to pay.

Prosperity is often said to harden the heart; but there certainly are some persons upon whom it produces a different effect, or, at any rate, there are some sorts of happiness which produce an expression of the heart which leads it to pour forth its kindly feelings upon all around. Had Charles just been meeting with a rebuff in his young authorship, he would have been very far from feeling the same tender movement of compassion which he now did towards Mrs. Sherbourne. But as it was, he with perfect

sincerity and most true sympathy felt all the contrast of their situations. She had been most painfully mortified; he had been cheered and gratified, almost beyond his highest hopes. From his very soul he pitied her. Her delicate little person seemed to shrink, and almost dissolve away, as, with her large eyes still filled with tears, she threw herself into a corner of the carriage, and sighed as if her heart was positively in the very act of breaking, as the rumbling vehicle drove off.

It is unnecessary to enter into any detailed description of what passed during this drive. Mrs. Sherbourne professed to have studied the human heart, and it is likely enough that she had done so. Certain it is, that she read aright the pitying softness which tempered the voice and spoke in the eyes of her young companion. It is certain, too, that she thought him altogether fascinating, and he thought her the same, as often chances to be the case between two persons, one knowing the world rather more than enough, and the other not knowing it at all, for each finds something new to study and admire.

Nevertheless, her parting words to him were, "Dear friend, you must not come to me to-morrow! I will not see you again till I am more myself. My feelings have been harassed and agitated to-day more than is good for me. To-morrow must be a day of self-examination and repose. But the day after, Chesterfield, the day after, we will meet again!"

"Must it be so?" cried Charles, almost passionately; "I dare not disobey you! But oh, Mrs. Sherbourne! how wearily long will the hours seem till Sunday!"

CHAPTER XX.

A short Chapter, which contains a few important Facts.

FOR some reason or other, our hero felt more inclined for solitary musings and a solitary breakfast on the following morning, than even for the gentle smiles of the beautiful Clara; and the breakfast-table in Bruton-street was therefore surrounded only by the family trio. As soon as her tea and coffee duties were ended, Clara rose, and left the room, feeling absolutely incapable of continuing the gossiping conversation any longer.

"That is just what I wanted her to do," said Mrs. Longuéville, settling herself in her own chair—"for I must positively speak to you about her. Do you not think she is looking wretchedly ill, George? I strongly suspect that something has occurred to vex her."

"Do you think so, Amelia? I declare I have not observed it," replied the baronet. "What is it makes you think so?"

“Look at her with a little more attention, brother, and the fact will hardly escape you. As you have not observed her looking ill, it follows, of course, that you have not, like me, been exercising your ingenuity to discover the cause of it. But I think it is time that you should observe both the one and the other. Your daughter is breaking her heart for Dalrymple, Sir George. I have no more doubt of this fact than of my existence.”

“Nonsense, Amelia; I, on my side, have no doubt that they understand each other perfectly well. This whim of his, which has taken him off in the very middle of the London season, may, likely enough, be a vexation to her, and may make her look what you call ill; but I will bet what you like that it arises solely from some lovers’ quarrel. You know that she is as proud as Lucifer, and I dare say she has taken some miff, and sent him off in dudgeon.”

“Did I believe you to be in funds, brother, to pay a bet without inconvenience, I should be ready to accept one on this point to any amount you please. There has been no question of love between them. None, none whatever. Of this I feel perfectly sure.”

“That is to say, that he has not yet proposed to her. Of course I know that. A fortune like Dalrymple’s rarely offers itself in secret. On such occasions papas are in nowise terrible. Nevertheless, Amelia, I am perfectly persuaded that they are lovers. Our shilling *écarté*, sister, though played admirably well on both sides, is not so absorbing as to prevent me seeing what has been going on at the tea-table—and the result of my observations is, that Arthur and Clara are in love with each other. Trust me, I know a little what men are, and women too.”

“And having made that profound discovery, Sir George, you think the rather more important matter of a marriage between them perfectly sure and certain, do you? I am sorry to say that that I am very essentially of a different opinion.”

“I confess I find it difficult to conceive what should prevent it. If he likes her, and she likes him, what on earth should keep them asunder?”

“Listen, and I will tell you. Mr. Dalrymple’s jealous notions of propriety will prevent it. He does not approve the domestication of your *protégé*, Sir George—and he has left London in order to cure himself of an inclination which his stiff-necked judgment does not approve. He would rather die than yield to passion at the expense of judgment.”

“Presuming all this to be true, will you do me the favour, Amelia, to tell me how you found it out? Has Arthur Dalrymple been making you his confidant?” said Sir George, somewhat sneeringly.

“I am not aware of the existence of any one less likely to indulge me in this way, than your accomplished ward,” replied Mrs. Longuéville. “But, on the other hand, I know no one to whom such sort of confidence is less necessary than to myself. I should as soon think of asking my adversary at whist what trumps he had in his hand, as require such communications from persons respecting whose private affairs I am interested. I trust to my own acuteness, brother, for the discovery of both.”

“And few persons, sister,” replied Sir George, bowing with the air of a Lord Oglebie, “might with equal safety trust to their own sagacity in either. But to be very serious. What can Mr. Dalrymple have ever seen or heard from our reserved and generally haughty Clara, which could by possibility give rise to such a feeling as jealousy of our worthy rustic Charles Chesterfield? The idea appears to me utterly preposterous.”

“Dalrymple is a man infinitely more likely to be influenced by what he fancies, than by what he sees, or, at any rate, by what others would see in his place,” returned the acute Mrs. Longuéville. “Were it not so, he must have long ago been aware that the reserved and haughty Clara, as you call her, had surrendered her heart to him, not only unconditionally but without being asked for it. However, I am far from regretting that on this point the young gentleman is somewhat less clear-sighted than myself. It is infinitely better that it should be so. Nevertheless, one of two courses must be pursued. We must either manœuvre so as to get Dalrymple back to town, pack off the village Apollo, to pipe amidst his native trees, and, this very absurd obstacle removed, trust to the mutual liking which most assuredly exists, for the settling matters in the right way—or, give up the gentleman and his ten thousand a-year as a forlorn hope, and endeavour to save the poor girl from a decline, by immediately changing the scene, and giving her something else to think of.”

“I presume it is not necessary, Amelia, that I should dilate to you upon the sincerity of my inclination to promote this match,” said Sir George. Mrs. Longuéville bowed. “Well then, let me state to you a fact, that you may find it more difficult to receive with faith. I have no intention whatever of following your suggestion respecting young Chesterfield. Most assuredly, Amelia, I shall not return my rustic Apollo to his woods.”

“Then you utterly discredit my assurance respecting the effect which his familiarity here has produced on Dalrymple?”

“I have such very perfect reliance on your habitual acuteness of observation, sister, that I can hardly say that; although, I confess, it appears to me most outrageously improbable that, in this

instance, you should be right. However, I confess to you, that this is not just now the most important question."

"What can you mean, Sir George Meddows?" demanded his sister, looking both surprised and alarmed.

"I will tell you," he said, drawing his chair close to her, speaking in a tone from which all lightness had vanished. "Mrs. Longuéville," he resumed, "you are the only person existing who really knows any thing of the actual state of my affairs—yet you are very far from knowing all. But, if you will give me a patient hearing for a few minutes, I will lay my precise situation before you. That the subject is a very disagreeable one, is the only reason why I have not asked your attention to it before. That I am a ruined man, Amelia, I believe you pretty well know already. That is to say, you know that were I to die to-morrow, it would require but a very few days to prove that I died insolvent: but you do *not* know how desperately difficult it is for me to live on from day to day; you do not know that there is not a single source from whence I could hope to squeeze a few hundreds by way of a loan, that I have not drawn upon, and totally exhausted, and that nothing but my still very sanguine hope of getting Darymple for my son-in-law has enabled me to breast the coming storm as I have done. Should this fail me!—But I will not, I am not, come to such a supposition as yet."

"But gracious Heaven, brother! if such be your position, how is it possible that you can deliberately declare it to be your intention to risk this last hope, for the sake of persevering in a patronizing whim which, pardon me, it was most exceedingly absurd ever to have conceived!"

"And do you really know me so very little, Mrs. Longuéville, as to fancy that I would have encumbered myself with this inspired lout without some prudential motive, strong enough for even yourself to approve? I have sometimes acted, I believe, like a fool, and oftener like a madman, but never surely like a passionate admirer of a young rustic's verses, or the patron of such a profitless cub as Charles Chesterfield."

"Do not torment me with riddles, brother!" said Mrs. Longuéville, knitting her brows, and speaking in a tone of vastly less softness than ordinary. "Tell me, in the name of common sense, and tell me at once, why you brought him, and why you persist in keeping him here? This is surely no moment for idle jesting."

"It is not, Amelia; and I will tell you all. In the first place, sister, I have already borrowed money of his father, and as I positively could not, without inconvenience, pay the interest due upon it when I saw the old man at the Grange, I was well enough

pleased to lay the whole race under an immeasurable obligation by bringing this lad up to town. But that is not all, Mrs. Longuéville," continued Sir George, occupying his eyes and hands in stirring the remnant of a cup of coffee; "that is not all—and to say truth, I almost wonder that the acuteness of which you boast has not already led you to divine the rest." Here he paused, and looking rather furtively at his sister, he perceived that she too was employed, like himself, in playing with a tea-spoon and coffee-cup. There must have been something of intelligence in her downcast face, for he said, "I think you understand me now, Amelia. I think you guess why I invited this young legatee to come and improve his fortune in London. Am I not right? Do you not divine the reason?"

"And if I do," she replied, "I am as far as ever from conceiving how it is possible that any accommodation which you may hope from him can be of sufficient importance to set against the remotest possibility of the arrangement being disapproved by Dalrymple. The one ought not to be balanced in your mind against the other."

"Nor could it, Amelia," replied Sir George, gloomily, "were it not that things are still worse with me than you as yet imagine."

"I wish to God, brother, that you would tell me the whole at once. I have a right to your confidence in every way. It is not the first time you have bestowed it upon me, and I think you will say that I never abused it. It is moreover necessary for my own affairs that I should know the worst. If any thing like a crisis is approaching, it will be desirable for me immediately to return to France—and, in that case, if Clara will pay me the same sum she now pays you, I will agree to take her with me, and do the best I can for her in Paris, till the storm is blown over. But it is essential that you should let me know all."

"Your consideration for me in this is great," replied the baronet, bitterly. "But it is very idle to shrink from hearing of an arrangement which is precisely what I should have most approved; and which I trust, sister, will eventually take place should the storm come, and not blow over till it has made a wreck of me. We are not quite come to this, however, as yet."

"But you have not yet told me what is this worst that remains behind. Pray, let me hear all," said Mrs. Longuéville, authoritatively.

"I have not the slightest inclination to conceal any thing," he replied. "On the contrary, I particularly wish that you should be acquainted with all the circumstances of my situation, in order, not only that if possible you should help me by your

advice, but also that you may judge me fairly. The most terrible pressure at the present moment, Amelia, arises from the absolute necessity of my settling the trust account with Dalrymple. That is the substance. All other fears are shadows."

"Do you mean that you have spent his money, George?" said Mrs. Longuéville, suddenly turning pale.

"Every sixpence of it," answered the baronet with stoic calmness.

"And you still fancy that he will marry your daughter?" she said.

"Not if he discovers the fact," replied Sir George. "For though I have every reason to believe him liberal, and even generous, in regard to money, I know him to have the most exaggerated notions respecting the necessity of exact accounts; and I do not believe that the woman exists who could turn his sober head sufficiently to make him connect himself—in short, to make him forget or forgive any inaccuracy of the kind. On this point, Mrs. Longuéville, my opinion cannot be shaken."

"I agree with you," was his sister's succinct reply.

"Then you perceive that no choice was left me between the utter destruction of all our hopes for poor dear Clara, and the submitting to avail myself of any means, however disagreeable, for getting out of this most horrible embarrassment?"

"And your plan is to borrow this silly young poet's legacy as soon as he gets into actual possession of it?"

"Exactly so," said Sir George.

"What if he fails you?"

"Then the game is up,—unless, indeed, you would yourself assist me, Amelia?"

Mrs. Longuéville fixed her dark eyes upon him in silence for half a minute, and then answered with a smile,—“These last are the only words you have spoken in this conversation, Sir George, that have very greatly surprised me; but I own I do wonder at hearing you propose what you so perfectly well know is ridiculous.”

"Of course, of course—I know it, I do know it perfectly. But you too know what sort of aid a drowning man will catch at. There is one other way, to be sure. Clara herself might lend me her five thousand."

"Lend it to you?" said Mrs. Longuéville interrogatively.

"True, Amelia. It would be very like asking for the loan of a leg of mutton. Yet if it were the means of marrying her?"

"And if the money were lent, Mr. Dalrymple paid, and no marriage follow? What would Clara's fate be then?"

"Then I should decidedly have managed vilely, both for myself and her. But young Chesterfield will lend me the money, I have

not the slightest doubt of it, and a proud man he will be that day, take my word for it—so far I feel safe. But there is a difficulty in point of time, you will observe, and it is exactly on that point that I want your advice. Dalrymple's claim upon me will come in July, or August, we'll say, at the very latest, and young Chesterfield will not be of age till December. How in the world am I to get over the interval?"

"Of course you must contrive in some way or other to postpone the settling. So no more of your great mental resources, Sir George; this can be a matter of no great difficulty."

"Well! we shall see. It would certainly be rather too hard upon me, sister, if, having no ready money, I had no ready wit either."

"You are playful this morning, Sir George," said his sister rising.

"Do not be in a hurry, Amelia. Do not be impatient to see me in a humour to hang myself. Perhaps it will come of itself by and by."

"And if it does, Sir George, I should consider both deeds to be equally childish. But tell me—merely as a matter of curiosity, will it be absolutely necessary to strip this unlucky boy bare. You surely cannot owe Mr. Dalrymple four thousand pounds?"

"I am afraid you are mistaken, Mrs. Longuéville. But even if you were right, even if, by borrowing this trifle, I were to find myself with a few pounds in my pocket, I would just ask you to whom would it be most necessary, to Charles Chesterfield, or to me? What are his wants, happy fellow! compared to mine? Just meat and drink, and a new suit once in two years—all of which his warm old father will be ready to give—and then just think of me!"

"Perfectly true, Sir George. I confess I often think of the comparative wealth of that class with much envy."

"And well you may! I am sure when they can help us, they ought to do it. But now I must be off, Amelia. I expect a fellow to meet me about a horse that I want to buy. Heigh ho! I have certainly eased my mind a little, by telling you all my troubles. But turn it in your head a little, that devilish problem I mean, about the difference of time. You will do me an essential service if you can hit upon some neat way of getting me out of that dilemma. I am sure you could help me if you would think about it."

"I am going to string some pearls for my hair to-night, and will meditate upon it with every bead I drop," said Mrs. Longuéville, moving towards the door, and looking as tranquil as if she had been enjoying the most agreeable conversation in the world.

“Thank you kind sister!” returned Sir George, gaily kissing her hand. “What a comfort it is to have a friend who so thoroughly understands me!”

“And, on my part, I can truly say that it is a comfort to have a brother who can appreciate my affection.”

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XXI.

A business-like Interview between Mrs. Sherbourne and Mr. Marchmont—A solemn League and Covenant.

MR. MARCHMONT was very tolerably punctual to the appointment he had made with Mrs. Sherbourne on quitting the theatre; that is to say, he arrived at her lodgings not much more than two hours after the time named. Had her visiter been one of the many who were accustomed to call upon her, merely to enjoy the pleasure of her fascinating conversation, it is probable she would have received him rather coolly, having ordered herself to be denied to some half-dozen dear friends during the interval that she was waiting for him. But very different were both her conduct and her feelings on the present occasion. That he should flirt with her faithfully and tenderly whenever they met, was but a secondary wish; that he should deal with her for a certain MS. which she had to dispose of was the first, and on this she was so intent that she was perfectly capable of forgiving his coming late, provided only that he came at last.

“I hardly know,” she said, after the first affectionate greeting was over, “I hardly know whether I am most delighted or most ashamed to see you here! My heart fails me when I think how many things you may have been obliged to neglect, in order to come to me!”

“No, no, I never neglect any thing, my charming Mrs. Sherbourne. Postponement is not neglect, you know. Show me the man who would not postpone the affairs of half-a-score of the male creation, for the luxury of listening to words uttered by such lips and eyes as those before me,—show me such a one, and I will tell him frankly that he is not worthy to live. Thank Heaven! I am not so constituted.”

“Still that flattering voice!” said Mrs. Sherbourne, with a sort of plaintive playfulness. “Alas! it is business—harsh, hateful, inexorable business that we must discuss to-day.” Mr. Marchmont was decidedly a man of gallantry, and nowise unconscious of, or insensible to, his power over the female mind; but he knew also what was due to his station as editor and part proprietor of *The Regenerator*, and would not easily have forgiven himself had he suffered a flirtation with any woman breathing to make him

unmindful of his interest. "You are right, dear madam," said he, suddenly permitting himself to sink down into a middle-aged man of business. "I shall be happy to hear what you have got to propose to me. It is my duty as well as my inclination to listen to you with the utmost attention."

"I am sadly unqualified for the task, Mr. Marchmont," she replied, "but nevertheless must screw my courage to it, for alas! it is necessary. I tremble to name it even, but there is a work that I wish to dispose of."

"I presume, Mrs. Sherbourne, that it is either a tale, or a series of tales, or novelettes, which you are about to propose to me?" said Marchmont, as if rather eager to bring her to the point at once.

"No, sir—not so," she replied. "I flatter myself that I have something to propose considerably more worthy your attention. My life, Mr. Marchmont, has been a very remarkable one. Born on the bosom of the Adriatic, in a steam-boat, bound to Ancona, the first breath I drew was impregnated with poetry and love. I will not ask you to follow me now through every shining accident by flood and field which marked my first days of existence, nor yet will I give you even a glance of the mazy labyrinth of youthful passion through which it was my lot to wind my tangled doubtful way, at an age when girls less set apart and marked by fate are still playing with their waxen babies in the nursery. But all this is faithfully recorded, Mr. Marchmont, and with a naïve sincerity of truth, of which Jean Jacques Rousseau alone, besides myself, has ever set an example. It is for this I wish to find a purchaser."

"You have been perfectly right, my dear madam, perfectly right," cried Mr. Marchmont, betrayed into greater approbation than it was at all editorial to express; "no other system of autobiography can by possibility be worth attention. But I beg your pardon. Let me not interrupt you. You were going on. What further particulars were you about to mention?"

"Nay, you do well to speak to me!" said Mrs. Sherbourne, clasping her hands; "call it not interruption; your words fall upon my spirit like the favouring breeze that wafts the frail overladen vessel to its port! O Mr. Marchmont! you little guess what it is for one so utterly unfit to breast the storms of life as I am, to offer my second soul, as I may call it, for sale! To carry my sorrows and my joys to market! To ask, to urge—even such a noble mind as yours, to give me gold for turning traitor to my own precious thoughts, and laying bare my heart of hearts to all men!" Here she stopped, and, covering her face with her hands, gave her admiring auditor every reason to suppose that she was

suffering from very vehement agitation. The critic was by no means displeased by this description of the wares she offered, and really wished the fair sufferer to proceed in her *catalogue raisonné* of the subjects of her work; but could find nothing more original to say by way of tranquillizing her spirits than the somewhat hackneyed phrase—"Compose yourself!"

"Compose myself!" she repeated meekly, and withdrawing her hands from her face; "you bid me compose myself, Mr. Marchmont, and with my hand on the sacred pages which I am about to violate, in order to sustain existence!" And here she spread her little hand upon a large thick volume which lay upon the table, and, fixing her appealing eyes on her companion, shook her head, and her curls most touchingly.

"This is the work then, is it?" said Mr. Marchmont, stretching out his hand rather eagerly to seize upon it.

"Yes! that is it," she replied. "That is the record of every thought and of every deed for the last fifteen years. But being such, you cannot, of course, my dear sir, for a single moment suppose that I would let it meet the eye of day till I am cold in earth?" and so saying, she too stretched forth her hand, and, again laying it upon the precious manuscript, retained it in its place.

"But, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne!" exclaimed Mr. Marchmont, laughing, as it seemed, very heartily, "you are not going at your age to propose to me the purchase of a work which is not to be published till after your death? Could you at this moment see your own fair face, and youthful person, you would perceive as I do the—the—pardon me, the absurdity of the notion." And again he laughed aloud.

Mrs. Sherbourne fixed her eyes upon him with that sad heavy melancholy look which is produced by dropping the head and raising the eyes at the same time; and, sighing profoundly, once again shook that fair head and all its ringlets with an action as melancholy as that of Hamlet's father's ghost.

"What is it you mean, charming Mrs. Sherbourne?" said Marchmont, looking very much as if he were inclined to laugh again.

"May I trust you?" she said, in a tone of deep solemnity. "May I?"

"Assuredly you may. Can you doubt it?"

"I may not, must not doubt it," she replied. "It is not my life that hangs upon my trust in you, but it is something infinitely dearer still—it is my honour."

Perhaps this might not have been the first time that words very like these had been addressed to Mr. Marchmont, and under ordinary circumstances he would have been extremely well able to

understand what they meant; but at this moment, unless they were uttered prospectively, or prophetically, he could not understand them at all, and his looks probably expressed this, for Mrs. Sherbourne presently added, "Oh! you do not comprehend me! Alas! alas! you guess not what I mean!"

"I am afraid you are right, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne. I really cannot make you out at all this morning," he replied, with perhaps some little indication of being weary of the mystification, and wishing to have it brought to a conclusion as soon as convenient.

"I will explain myself, Mr. Marchmont; have patience with me! It is a very awful moment! But I *will* rouse my sinking courage, and explain myself fully." She paused for a moment, passed her hand once or twice slowly across her forehead, closed her eyes, as if to throw their light inward for the purpose of setting things a little to rights in her distracted mind, and then, heaving another long drawn sigh, resumed:

"I grieve to own it, Mr. Marchmont, for I believe in the estimation of many well-meaning persons it is considered as disgraceful, but I am in debt beyond any probable means of payment, unless I immediately avail myself of all the resources I can command for raising money, and at the same time place myself in a position which shall render it impossible for me to spend any more. Such is the task before me."

Mr. Marchmont looked grave, and inclined his head, as if in acquiescence, but said nothing.

"My play may, or may not succeed," she continued; "but in neither case will it affect my present determination. It is to these Memoirs that I look for the means of extricating myself from a pressure that I feel to be intolerable. Will you, before I explain myself further, permit me to point out to you one or two passages in these pages which will, I think, eventually be found to render them of considerable value in a commercial point of view?"

"I am entirely at your service for the next hour, Mrs. Sherbourne," replied the Regenerator, in a very business-like tone.

"I thank you, sir. That time will, I think, fully suffice, as my task will not be long; were it so, I must sink ere it were fully done!"

She then took the heavy volume on her knee, and began to turn over its closely-written pages. "Few of your profession, or mine either, Mr. Marchmont," she resumed, with a melancholy smile, "are ignorant of the fact that biting personal anecdotes are the most marketable of all literary commodities; and when they are skilfully given, with just enough of concealment to produce the effect of mystery, and yet with sufficient clearness not

quite to elude the curiosity they provoke, the demand is, I believe, as certain as that for green peas during the last days of May, or for partridges during the month of September."

"You are quite right, Mrs. Sherbourne. It is the only literary speculation I know of that is absolutely without risk. Scorn and scoffing on certain subjects will sometimes run, but occasionally there is a check to this. Impassioned writing also, when it is thrown off in a style sufficiently unrestrained, will often prove extremely saleable. But this altogether depends upon the critical notices. If nobody can be found sufficiently obliging to sing out that such a work is too improper to read, the chances are greatly in favour of its proving a dead loss. But sharp personalities will cut their own way to notice pretty generally without fail, and are, as you justly observe, by far the best business we have. May I hope that you have something of this kind to offer me?"

"You shall yourself be the judge," replied Mrs. Sherbourne, complacently; and opening the volume at a page where there were many initials, and many asterisks, she turned it to him, saying, "Read that and the two or three following pages, my dear sir, and tell me if you think it possible that any one can miss the interpretation?" Mr. Marchmont eagerly drew the book towards him, and set himself to the perusal of it very attentively; Mrs. Sherbourne keenly watching him the while, as a believing alchymist of yore might have watched the working together of some of the impure materials, from the mixture of which he hoped to produce gold. When he had reached the limit prescribed, however, Mrs. Sherbourne, with a sort of gentle violence, seized upon the volume and withdrew it from his hands. "That is enough, quite enough," she said, "to enable you to form an opinion as to the aim I have taken, and the hardness of the hits I can give. Do you think, Mr. Marchmont, that any one can blunder as to the persons alluded to? Are my sketches in danger of being mistaken?"

"Certainly not," he replied, with an air of great interest, but with rather a nervous and frightened expression of countenance.

"And I have not splashed my heros and heroines with milk and water, or pelted them with feathers, have I?"

"Upon my soul, madam, you have not. The danger is of another kind. I don't feel quite sure that we might not get into a scrape about damages. Are you quite sure that there is not something like a libel there?"

"There is not the least danger in the world, I do assure you. If you will observe, there are one or two mystifications mixed up with the statements, which might most satisfactorily be pleaded

to prove non-identity, that delightful *alibi* for scandal-mongers, or, more properly speaking, for moral satirists. What jury will dare to declare that A—n—y must mean Alonby, or B—t—n, Betroom? especially if A—n—y is described as having but one brother, when the Alonby attacked has two; and B—t—n stated to be forty, when it is notorious that she is not more than thirty-three? No! Trust me, that throughout the whole there is not a single person that can be mistaken, nor a single allusion proved."

"Decidedly that is the secret for the preparation of the desired article," said Marchmont, laughing, "there is no denying it. For myself, I confess to you that I long ago determined to have nothing to do with that species of writing which attacks crimes instead of men, and classes instead of individuals. Such impersonal attacks are worth exceedingly little in my estimation, and, instead of satires, are but a trifle better than sermons; for, of course, when a hundred different originals may be pointed out, it is perfectly evident that the portrait can have none of the animating interests which belongs to the likeness of an individual. Such generalisation may be vastly moral, but is altogether out of my way."

"My view of the thing is exactly the same as yours, Mr. Marchmont," eagerly replied Mrs. Sherbourne; "I would no more waste the biting cleverness of my pen upon attacking any of the prevailing sins of mankind, without aiming the lash against an individual, than I would send a letter by the post without putting an address upon it. It is a sort of Quixotic windmill fighting which is totally out of my line. It suits me infinitely better to take my stand in a well-victualled touch-me-not sort of a castle, where I can take aim through a loop-hole. Were I to trust my whole manuscript to you, Mr. Marchmont, you would perceive that those are my tactics; and that in becoming the purchaser of it, you would have nothing to fear from my having substituted heavy homilies against sin, in the place of piquante pasquinades against sinners."

"This description, it must be confessed, is exceedingly inviting, my dear lady," replied Marchmont, evidently interested by the account she had thus given of herself and her works; "but that terrible clause, which you have declared to be absolute, respecting the non-appearance of these Memoirs till after your death; you must be aware that at your age this condition must reduce the saleable value of the work to less than a tenth of what I might be tempted to give, were I privileged to put the first part of it into *The Regenerator* of next month."

"Next month!" repeated Mrs. Sherbourne, with something like a shudder, while her countenance, suddenly losing its gay

and animated expression, assumed an aspect of the deepest melancholy. "Next month!—Ah! that is sudden."

"Nay, it would suit me very nearly as well if I could have it by the month after. But that is very different, you know, to putting it off till after your death."

Mrs. Sherbourne sighed heavily, and once more shook her head. "Alas!" she murmured, "You know not what you say! Before another month shall have begun and ended its course, Mr. Marchmont, this little earthly tabernacle of a soul too mighty for it, will lay down to rest in its early grave for ever and for ever!"

"What in God's name can you mean, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne?" said her companion, staring at her; "you really appear to me to be as likely to live as I am."

"Nature may, perhaps, be of the same opinion; for truly she is at work within me, as if she had no notion of the event which fate sits smiling at. Will you deny, sir, that will—ay, woman's will—may be stronger than nature?"

"My dear madam, what *do* you mean? You cannot surely intend to destroy yourself?" said Mr. Marchmont, really looking a little terrified without any acting at all."

"Why not?" returned Mrs. Sherbourne, in the calm quiet voice of philosophy. "Why not, my good sir? Tell me why not?"

"Is it possible that you have so horrible an idea in your head?—But, no, it is impossible! You are not in earnest, Mrs. Sherbourne."

"In my head, in my heart, in my very soul, and in that soul's master, my indomitable will!" replied Mrs. Sherbourne, with very sublime solemnity. "Marchmont, you know me not! Never, so help me, my good wit and the next druggist's shop,—never will I live a coward in my own esteem, when death appears to me a better boon than life; no, Marchmont, not for an hour!"

"The thought is a sublime one, my charming friend, and were you other than what you are, I could not choose but admire it. But in your case, dear lovely Mrs. Sherbourne, the idea is not to be borne. For Heaven's sake, why should you kill yourself? Why should so terrible an idea find place in your bosom?"

"Simply, good friend, because I am weary of life. I have roamed from clime to clime, and—wherefore should I make a secret of it, when it is all written here, (laying her hand upon her manuscript) from passion to passion—from peace to turmoil—and from joy to woe. I have tried all things, Marchmont, and all things that I have touched upon have returned an empty hollow sound, sadly unlike the music that I sought."

"What can I say to you, my dearest Mrs. Sherbourne?" he replied, as if in truth very sincerely puzzled as to what it was

fitting to do or say next, and at the same time casting a purchaser's glance at the manuscript.

"Tell me what you will give for my manuscript, Mr. Marchmont? it is all I ask of you," she replied.

"I give you my honour, madam, that I never found myself so utterly at a loss as to what I ought to say in answer to a question bearing the appearance of being so very direct and straightforward, and yet involving difficulties innumerable! It is inexpressibly painful, Mrs. Sherbourne; I might truly and without the slightest exaggeration say it is agonising, to me to reply to you in the manner that truth dictates; yet how can I avoid it, when the demand is made in a manner so perfectly professional and direct?"

"You cannot avoid it, Mr. Marchmont," returned the lady, "without forfeiting for ever the esteem of every human being possessing courage enough to speak the truth, and honesty enough to act according to its divine dictates. Why, when an unhappy woman, driven by the most piercing agony of mind, opens to you her whole heart, why should you, merely because you discover thereby the plan by which she has determined to escape from it, why should you treat her with less generosity than you would have done had her sorrows still remained unknown? Is this well, Marchmont? Is it manly? Is it liberal? Had I, after having shown you the sample of my manuscript which you have seen, asked you to purchase it, and had you at the same time been privately assured by a physician that I could not live, you would not thus have shrunk from answering the question I have asked you. Yet you will hardly deny, Marchmont, that if I engage to continue this Memoir of my life down to the very last moment of my waning existence, if I narrate, with all the power of language of which I am capable, and all the strength of feeling such moments must of necessity excite, the emotions of my soul as the deadly drug is doing its work; if I do this, Mr. Marchmont, you will hardly deny that the saleable value of the work will be increased thereby. Can you deny this, sir?"

The truth of this was so overpoweringly apparent to the Regenerator, that he gave way; his struggles suddenly ceased, and, with that bluntness, which, with persons at a certain level of principle, is often put on as a mask to hide their real features, he exclaimed, "It is almost cruel of you, Mrs. Sherbourne, to make me hate my own honesty; but, for the life of me, I cannot tell a lie when a question is put to me so directly. Yes, it is quite true, madam, and I grieve from my soul to say it—it is quite true that I would give a higher price for a work so brought

to a conclusion, than for the same work finished under other circumstances." And having thus spoken, Mr. Marchmont sat very gloomily looking upon the carpet, with his brows knit, and his arms folded, as if he was very unhappy indeed.

"With my last breath shall my spirit bless you, Marchmont!" said Mrs. Sherbourne, in reply. "You have proved yourself to be the noble being I have heretofore been taught to think you. It is now proper that I should let you know that I have already settled every thing. Of course you pledge me your most sacred word that all which now passes between us is under the most solemn seal of secrecy."

"Of course," replied Mr. Marchmont, gloomily.

"Then, of course, my dear, my best, my latest friend, I can have no further reserve with you—nor you with me. THE EVENT is fixed, immutably fixed, Marchmont, to take place on the 27th of September. Reasons, which you will understand when you come to read my manuscript, have led me to fix that day. O Heavens! it will be the happiest I have known for years! No day will pass till its arrival, Marchmont, without my adding something to this checquered record. Oh! it is a mosaic, made up of all the lights and shades of my much-rainbowed life! There is gloom herein, black as the dimmest smoke of hell, my friend; but there are tints, too, bright as the glowing glory of a seraph's wing, where sunbeams blend with dew!"

There was something in the cadence of this speech so exceedingly touching, that Mr. Marchmont was actually obliged to cover his face with both his hands, in order to conceal his emotion. It must, indeed, have been a very bad heart that could have remained untouched by it.

"Now then, to conclude this trying interview," she resumed, in accents more prosaic, "now then, tell me, Mr. Marchmont, what sum you will be willing to give me immediately by cheque, *on account*—and tell me also for what additional sum you will engage to account to any friend I may appoint to receive it when all is over."

The internal calculations which took place in the mind of the Regenerator before he could answer this question were of a homely accurate kind, which would fall but uncouthly on the mind of a reader after perusing the foregoing truly touching scene. Neither can the answer which he ultimately gave be fairly considered as matter of legitimate history. Suffice it, therefore, to say, that a cheque was given, and that the parties separated, mutually satisfied by the result of their very interesting interview. (1)

(1) This scene has been sketched after the model of one said to have recently taken place in Paris.

CHAPTER XXII.

Rapid Progression of the Hero in many Ways.—The Snares of Love encompass him, and, though he struggles a little, there is every Appearance of his being led away Captive—Miss Meddows becomes exceedingly miserable—Sir George Meddows falls sick—Mrs. Sherbourne displays great Ability.

FROM this period, the metropolitan progress of Charles Chesterfield went on at a very rapid rate. The great facility with which his loquacious pen could run over page after page, either in prose or rhyme, made him an invaluable acquisition to Mr. Marchmont, whose own turgid expositions of fantastical theories were not produced without more labour than he liked to give; and his literary ambition was already satisfied, by having acquired the reputation of the most fearless setter-forth of religious, moral, and political heresies in Europe. In truth, he rejoiced exceedingly at an opportunity of resting upon his oars; the having met with a young man equally able and willing to fill his pages for him, in whatever tone he might choose to dictate, with a degree of freshness and vivacity, too, that really gave interest to the articles he produced, and in a situation which did not render starvation inevitable upon his not being paid, was a piece of very important good fortune to the Regenerator. The more he felt this, the more he condescended to raise the rustic penman to the proud level of his personal intimacy. As to all the social delights, indeed, which literary men are sometimes supposed particularly to enjoy, Mr. Marchmont was not in the habit of supping or of dining either where he was *eaten*, but solely where he *ate*; and it was therefore not at his own dwelling, but at the houses of his friends, and his friends' friends, that the critic introduced young Chesterfield to those convivial boards of London, where the well-known pleasant banter is carried on between those who give the feast and those who accept it,—where turbot is repaid by talk,—champagne settled for by a draught (not a cheque) on wit,—a sprinkling of satire honestly tendered in exchange for spicy and piquant sprinklings of lesser pungency, but perhaps of equal value,—and where philosophy, science, the *belles lettres*, and, occasionally, all the most recondite secrets of government, are freely offered, *à discrétion*, in return for the fricandeaux, vol-au-vent, blanquettes, and rotis, which constitute the *matériel* of a London literary dinner party. This species of progress, once begun, goes on easily enough, and with a sort of steady crescendo movement, which speedily gives to the once elected show member of every intellectual coterie a privileged *entrée* to the mansions of all the amphibious belonging to it. For, whether a newly-accepted genius be agreeable or not, it is obviously the interest of all who

have once fed him, to persuade their friends and acquaintance that no lion, when feeding, ever roared so like a nightingale as their lion; which report, once well circulated, places the feeders, as well as the fed, in a very enviable position, and, moreover, prevents all danger of their being left to perform the delightful but costly office alone.

In this manner it happened, in what appeared to himself to be an incredibly short space of time, that Charles Chesterfield found himself invited out to dinner two or three times every week, and entreated to show himself at more evening parties than days and hours gave him time for. In a word, Charles Chesterfield was the fashion, and became,

“If not quite the first, in the very first line.”

Thus was he, as if by the hand of a magician, at once placed on what appeared to him the very highest pinnacle of human fame and of human happiness; and it was not very extraordinary if his head failed him, and he turned giddy. One or two circumstances, also, not necessarily or usually connected with the ordinary routine of a handsome young scribbler, suddenly pushed forward into popularity, contributed to render this species of vertigo pretty nearly inevitable in the case of poor Charles. One of these arose out of the confidential conversation which has been recorded, as having taken place between Sir George Meadows and his sister. Till this occurred, Mrs. Longuéville had no idea of what vital importance the young man's remaining with them for a few months longer really was; but from the moment she comprehended this, her manner towards him was completely changed, which he, poor lad, his brain having no place left in it for any idea unconnected with his literary success, attributed to the irresistible influence of his growing fame. Unfortunately, too, there appeared at the same time a change in the manners of Clara, which, seen through the prism of his vanity, appeared to him tinted with the same glorious hues as every thing else around him, and appeared to be, like all the rest, an offering to his genius and his fame.

Poor Clara was indeed an altered being. Persuaded that her own strength of mind would protect her from what she deemed the despicable destiny of loving, while unbeloved, she had permitted her preference of Dalrymple's society to grow upon her till every thing else in the world had become “flat, stale, and unprofitable;” and when she lost it, at a moment, too, when it seemed assured to her for some months at least, the pang was too sharp to permit her deceiving herself longer; and at the very moment when she discovered beyond the possibility of doubt that he cared not for her, she discovered also that she had given

her whole heart to him. Such a conviction as this might well tame whatever looked like haughtiness in a character like hers, and, in truth, such a feeling of hopeless dejection took possession of her, as effectually dimmed the eagle brightness of her eye, and changed the lofty bearing which might have well become Diana, into the drooping languor of her least-favoured nymph. Yet, despite her secret and self-centred sorrows, Clara's keen faculties were not so blunted as to prevent her noticing the remarkable change in her aunt's manners towards young Chesterfield, and this, joined to a very perceptible increase of civility and observance on the part of her father, also renewed all her first suspicions as to the motive which had led to his being brought to London. It was with a fearful shudder that she once more yielded to the conviction of her father's base intentions towards him; and it was with a firmness of purpose less likely to be shaken than that by which she had hoped to guard her own tranquillity from the misery of unrequited affection, that she resolved to guard the unsuspecting young man from the danger which threatened him from fraud and villany, that it almost killed her to think of.

It appeared to her that the most effectual mode of doing this would be by leading him into such a degree of confidential intimacy as would induce him to communicate to her whatever proposals might be made to him respecting his little fortune, when it came into his hands, either by her father, or any one else. With this view she encouraged him to converse freely with her on all subjects, invited him to repeat his visits to her little study, and, in a word, prepared herself to watch over his safety, with an intensity of interest exactly proportioned to the horror which the idea of its being endangered by her father occasioned her.

Charles Chesterfield was not quite such a coxcomb as to think Miss Meddows was positively in love with him, but most assuredly he believed that his talents and growing celebrity had produced the distinguished regard she showed him; and it is exceedingly probable that our besotted hero might have been beguiled into dreaming not only that he was himself violently in love with her, but also that it was possible she might be won to love him in return, had not all his meditations, having this tendency, been very forcibly driven to another quarter.

The information respecting the young man's future prospects and present independence, which Miss Almeria Gibson had obtained from Miss Meddows, had been faithfully conveyed to Mrs. Sherbourne by some of her friends in the Gibson family; and the consequence was, that many of those hours which ought, according to agreement, to have been given to the melancholy

but sublime occupation of drawing her memoirs towards the awful conclusion which she had promised Mr. Marchmont, were employed in the most unremitting endeavours so completely to turn poor Charles Chesterfield's head, as to make him commit the solemn absurdity of marrying her. The probable success of these endeavours appeared to vary from day to day; for sometimes it was evident that the young man's thoughts, even when seated close beside her, would dare to wander somewhere or other where she was not; while at other times, it was at least equally easy to perceive, that her charms, and the manner in which she brought them in array against him, were more than his heart could stand; that resistance on his part was daily becoming more hopeless, and that, if nothing unexpectedly hostile to her views occurred to prevent it, she had a very good chance, by the time he was twenty-one, of being led to the feet of his venerable parents as a fair young bride, and their beautiful and dutiful daughter-in-law.

Thus passed the months of May and June, with no variation as to the ultimate objects pursued by the various persons of our drama, and with very little remissness as to the efforts made to obtain them, so that all things went on steadily towards their success.

Mrs. Sherbourne's play was actually acted, and actually damned; but she bore it with a patient firmness, which Mr. Marchmont attributed to her approaching dissolution, and she herself to her approaching marriage, while the rest of the world greatly admired her calm philosophy.

Mrs. Gibson continued to buy, beg, borrow, and steal every engraving, etching, lithograph, drawing, and daub, that she could lay her hands upon, in order to swell the mass under which her buried Milton groaned. Mr. Gibson went on admiring his wife and daughters more and more every day he lived.

Mr. Marchmont ceased not to laud and patronize the young author; and in the course of about ten weeks collected from him a heterogeneous mass of moonshine meditations, sufficient to supply all gaps that might occur in *The Regenerator* for a twelve-month to come—but without, as yet, having hinted at any payment.

Charles himself continued, he really knew not very well how, or why, to make tenderer and tenderer love to Mrs. Sherbourne; and any skilful sporting man, who had watched it all, might have been tempted to make an even bet, that whenever Mrs. Sherbourne could find a good opportunity of making him a direct offer of marriage, he would accept it. But somehow or other the poor lad, notwithstanding all his triumphs, and the extreme

happiness of which he often boasted to Clara, had either no courage, or no time, to write any more letters to Bessy. From all further correspondence with Mr. Westbrook he abstained upon principle, having an affronted sort of consciousness that the old gentleman was disposed rather to laugh at him than admire his productions, or rejoice in their success. All his correspondence with his home, therefore, was carried by letters to and from his mother, she being in fact the only member of his family who entirely approved his present situation, or admired the printed results of it, which, notwithstanding, were regularly sent off per coach the very day they appeared in London.

Sir George and his sister, meanwhile, continued on terms of the most affectionate confidence, having frequent *tête-à-tête* conferences, and even mutually coming to the same conclusion, that whatever circumstances rendered it expedient to do, that must of course be done, and that nothing but the most pitiable weakness, and ignorance of the world, could for a moment lead any one to doubt or hesitate about it for an instant.

Yet, notwithstanding all this "excellent sympathy" between them, each had a sort of invisible by-play, a quiet little *dessous les cartes* of their own. Sir George did not think it either necessary or advisable to harass the delicate nerves of his sister, by communicating to her the rather desperate efforts he was making to redeem his ruined fortunes by play; nor did she feel herself by any means called upon to mention to him the very earnest watchfulness with which she studied the state of his temper, and every other index by which she might calculate the precise distance of the ruin which she knew must come, in order to regulate her own retreat from the falling fabric in the best manner possible,—that is to say, in order that she might ascertain the moment at which she could resume her former mode of life in showy apartments, *au troisième*, at Paris, with the best chance of losing no pleasure, and of sharing no pain, which her residence with her beloved brother afforded.

Poor Clara, too, was an anxious and watchful looker-on, though by no means so acute a one as her aunt. With tingling cheeks and a beating heart, she observed, however, that her unworthy father's paltry little devices for obtaining current cash recurred more frequently than ever, and often were put in practice with so bold a defiance of every thing like delicacy, that she came to the same conclusion as Mrs. Longuéville, as to believing that, despite his frequent laughter and irregular fits of high spirits, he was more involved than he was at all likely to avow; but she was still far from suspecting, as her wiser aunt did, that the catastrophe which must disclose all was fast approaching. Per-

haps, after all, her most anxious thoughts respecting pecuniary matters related to her fears respecting her father's motives for the rapidly increasing professions of his affection towards Charles ; and the only decided resolution which she took as to her own conduct, under the painful position in which she found herself, was that of preventing the young man's legacy being borrowed, which she felt but too sure would be attempted as soon as he should be in possession of it—a period now very rapidly approaching.

As to Dalrymple, every thing like hope of his returning to town before the end of the London season had vanished from her mind. For the first fortnight after his departure, Sir George seemed determined to believe that he was coming back again ; but from that period he had ceased to name him. A dreadful source of new anxiety was, however, ere long added to all her other sufferings. This arose from a casual remark made by a gentleman who had dined with them, on the near approach of Mr. Dalrymple's second majority. "You give up your guardianship of Dalrymple next month, Sir George, don't you?" said he, carelessly.

Accidentally, rather than from design, Clara's eyes followed those of the person who asked this question, and fixed themselves on her father's face. She saw his colour change ; he became suddenly pale, and, though evidently making a strong effort to rally, he suffered many seconds to elapse before he found voice to say,

"Yes, I think so."

Whether any one else noticed the effect produced by this question, she had no means of judging. Mrs. Longuéville was engaged in carefully preparing for herself a plate of early strawberries. Charles was doing the same thing for her ; and the only other person present either was, or appeared to be, perfectly unobservant of the tone in which his question had been answered. But she wanted not any other commentary. Her own was terribly sufficient to convince her that Arthur Dalrymple's coming of age was an event, the near approach of which made her father tremble. For this there could be but one reason, and that reason, that only, that real reason, at once occurred to her with a certainty that could hardly have been increased had she heard her father himself avow it. Upon the accession of misery which this brought it is not necessary to dwell.

In general, Clara was scrupulously polite towards her aunt, and scrupulously observant of her convenience ; but now she forgot every thing save the necessity of being alone, and, suddenly rising, she had reached the door before Mrs. Longuéville

had laid aside her knife and fork. Determined to avenge herself by a severe lecture in private for this very extraordinary want of attention, the offended aunt followed her niece to the door, and gave so stern a look as she passed her, that could the poor girl have noticed any thing, she might have repented her precipitation. But had Jupiter knit his brows at her at that moment, she would not have heeded it. Instead of following Mrs. Longueville to the drawing-room, she mounted in darkness to her own chamber, and there tortured herself by the most accurate anticipation of all that would and must follow upon the approaching settlement of accounts, if her father had made away with the money for which he was accountable to his ward.

Eternal estrangement, and such a degree of contempt and anger as must stamp her name and race on his memory as for ever coupled with disgrace, were inevitable. Long did her poor aching head, laid but not resting, on her pillow, painfully meditate upon this woeful theme, till at length she came to the determination of sacrificing a part, or, if necessary, the whole of her own little fortune, to make good this justly-suspected deficiency before it became known to Dalrymple. This resolution might have brought something like comparative ease to her mind, had it not been for the great difficulty of putting it in practice. Never, upon any occasion, had her father breathed to her the slightest hint as to the existence of any embarrassment in his affairs; and she must therefore, before she could assist him under the crisis he so evidently dreaded, lead him to speak with some degree of openness upon a theme which it appeared to be the first object of his domestic tactics to avoid.

But her purpose was not of a kind to be stopped by any obstacle which could be removed by a steadfast will; and she rose from her bed, groped her way in the dark to her washing-stand, bathed her eyes in cold water, and having descended the stairs and ascertained by a moment's pause at the drawing-room door that the gentlemen were there, and that consequently there was no immediate danger of a *tête-à-tête* with her aunt, she entered the room with that species of composure which results from having formed a resolution too steadfast to be shaken.

She would rather have avoided her father's eye, but this was impossible, for he gaily pronounced her name as she entered, saying, "Ah, Clara! I was just thinking that when we get that run-away Arthur back, we will have our long-projected water-party to Richmond. It is a shame to have had Chesterfield here for nearly three months without showing him *notre belle rivière*. Dalrymple *must* come back to settle with me, and luckily his birthday falls so early in July, that we shall still be able to get

together a good *singable* set." Here Sir George sneezed violently three or four times, but when the fit was over, he resumed: "I shall write to my dear capricious ward to-morrow, and let him know that I am ready, chapter and verse, house and chattels, pounds, shillings, and pence, for the great settling of accounts between us, for his minority of—how long is it? A year and a day, or some such thing. Here Sir George coughed a little; but, notwithstanding these symptoms of a violent and troublesome cold, he continued throughout the whole evening in excellent spirits, and was so gay and talkative at a rubber of whist which followed the departure of the tea-urn, that his sister was positively obliged to scold, in order to make him attend properly to the game. Yet all the time it was evident that he was seized with an exceedingly violent attack of cough and cold.

Clara was completely puzzled. It seemed to her utterly impossible that if the violent change of countenance she had remarked had arisen from the cause she suspected, he could speak thus lightly of Dalrymple's immediate return. Still more was she persuaded that she had mistaken, when at breakfast the following morning, though still suffering from very violent symptoms of cold, he put into her hands an open letter, saying—"Read that, Clara, and then seal and send it to the post for me. But tell me first, if you think it is sufficiently precise to bring up this *berger* of Herefordshire from his flocks and his cider-press. If not, I must add a postscript."

The letter ran thus—

"DEAR CORYDON,—I am inexpressibly sorry to feel myself under the necessity of breaking in upon your rustic existence, in which, without doubt, you are enjoying that *otium cum dignitate* for which so many great men sigh. But stern necessity obliges me to remind you that the day on which you complete your twenty-sixth year, and consequently attain your second majority, is the seventh of next month. Now be it known to you, most gentle shepherd, that however much the innocent joy of disporting in your flowery meads may have lapped your senses in oblivion of all such vulgar matters, I have not forgotten that there are sundry accounts to be settled between us on this occasion. Very seriously, my dear fellow, I must tell you, that however erratic and poetical you may be, my habits of business are too regular to permit my putting off such a settlement as this; and I must beg of you, Arthur, to let me see you for the purpose of getting through this business on the eighth. It can make no great difference to you, Dalrymple, whether you are up a few days earlier or later, but I love regularity in all matters of business too well to admit of any delay in this, without serious uneasi-

ness. Clara has promised to engage a singing water-party for me some day between the seventh and twelfth, for which you may come in if you will be good and punctual. But very seriously I request you not to fail me on the eighth."

* * * * *

"Is it possible that I have been tormenting myself thus dreadfully for nothing?" thought Clara, as she folded up the letter with a sensation of delight that seemed to repay her for all she had suffered. That she had wronged her father by her suspicions, she now felt certain, and that she must now see Dalrymple again, appeared to be certain too, so that a greater difference of feeling between the evening and the morning could hardly have been produced by any possible concurrence of circumstances that could have befallen her.

The letter was sent, and the days flew rapidly away, Sir George's fine spirits seeming to increase as the day for Dalrymple's return approached, of which event he had been assured by a friendly obliging letter received by return of post, and exhibited at the breakfast-table with all the cordial satisfaction felt by a warm-hearted man on the near arrival of a favourite friend.

Yet, notwithstanding all this "measureless content," Sir George Meddows still continued at intervals to show symptoms of one of the most violent coughs that ever was heard. When the fit seized him, indeed, he was generally obliged to leave the room, always declaring on his return that it was better to suffer alone than to make others suffer also by hearing him. Though not of a constitution or form to make any attack of the kind alarming, inasmuch as his breadth of chest was concerned, Clara began to talk of the necessity of his seeing a physician; and was the more disposed to believe this necessary, from perceiving that her aunt, who was usually the last to pay attention to any body's indisposition but her own, began to look very grave, and to declare that it was absolutely necessary he should take advice.

"Let me send for Dr. Stapleton, papa," said Clara, eagerly.

"Upon my honour, Clara, I won't see him if you do," replied the baronet very decidedly; though showing at the same time, by a violent access of his malady, that he was in great need of some curative process by which to get eased of it, for it was really frightful to hear him.

"And why not, brother?" said Mrs. Longuéville, in a voice which expressed something approaching resentment at his refusal. "You must be aware that your complaint is not one which can be safely trifled with. You owe it to your daughter to see Dr. Stapleton without an hour's delay, and I must positively insist upon your doing it."

"Surely, Amelia, I can owe to no one the submitting to see a man I particularly dislike," replied Sir George in the fretful accent of suffering. "If you really think my life in danger, let me see the physician who attends the Wilsons. I know he attended one of them in a complaint upon the lungs, and was thought to have saved his life. I should greatly prefer that man to the prig Stapleton."

"Do you know his name, papa?" demanded Clara, anxiously.

"He is a German," replied her father, "and his name is Batemonn. But if I must submit to this detestable sort of discipline, I had better write to Wilson, and get him to send this Dr. Batemonn here, than be forced to see any one else."

This proposal, being approved by both the ladies, was immediately acted upon, and in less than an hour a middle-aged gentleman, with a brown wig, and a pair of prodigiously thick eyebrows, stood beside the couch of the invalid. The ladies retired, and awaited the call that the physician promised them in the drawing-room, with much seeming anxiety, which, on the part of Clara, at least, was not only sincere, but very serious, for never had she seen her father appear so seriously ill.

The visit of the physician was rather a long one, and when it was over, the doctor entered the drawing-room with an air of so much gravity that Clara, for the first time, became really alarmed, and awaited his verdict almost in trembling.

"I find your fader moche dangerous, yong ladé," he said, placing himself in a chair beside her. "His longes are vary bad state, vary bad indeed!"

Clara was greatly affected, and drew forth her pocket handkerchief; Mrs. Longuéville immediately did the same.

"Be not toe moche cast down, my charming yong ladé—nor you neider, mein good frow," resumed the kind physician. "Dere is hop, vary great good hop, if de patient will do at vunce, at vunce observe, all dat I am going to see fit to order."

"I trust that as my father has consented to see you, Dr. Batemonn, he will consent also to follow your prescriptions. And as to every thing respecting diet, and the regularity of administering his medicines, you may depend upon having the most accurate attention paid to your orders," said Clara.

"My dear yong ladé, your fader is a veri happy fader to have so goot a child. Bote it is not de medicaments vat vill cure him. It is de change of air—noting bote de change of air will shave his life," replied the doctor with great solemnity.

"Do you think that it is necessary for my father to go to a southern climate, sir?" demanded Clara.

"No! By no means at dis moment is it necessary dat Seer

George should quit de kingdom. Bote it is London—it is de business and de bustle dat he most quit. All business vill be death. I quit him in de moment if he not promises to abstain from, and give up, all thought of business for de next five or six months. I will send him to Brighton; dat is de particular place I will send him to.”

The doctor then took his leave, and the moment after she received a message from her father, desiring to see her.

“My dear girl!” said Sir George, in a gentle and subdued voice, as she entered his room, “it is plain from what Dr. Batemmonn says, that he considers me in a very precarious state. But do not look so sad about it, my dear Clara; he tells me there is hope, if I will but faithfully adhere to his instructions, and this I will do, Clara. No man knows the value he puts upon his life, till a moment arrives in which he feels that he is in danger of losing it. I believe that upon all former occasions, I have been rather a troublesome patient for you, dear Clara; but I feel now that it is no time for jesting, and I shall most scrupulously obey this man’s instructions, let them be what they will.”

“He seems to wish that you should go immediately to Brighton, papa.”

“And to Brighton, Clara, I shall immediately go. And I will confess to you that I attend to this prescription the more readily because it is so perfectly disinterested. By keeping me here, he might get a guinea a-day out of me for months to come; but by sending me off he can get nothing but the consciousness that he is doing his duty. I begged hard, however, for a fortnight’s delay on account of dear Arthur’s business; but he would not hear of it, and has actually made me give him a solemn promise that I will not even sign my name for the next five or six months without his express permission. He says my life hangs by a thread, Clara, and if it be a weakness, I must e’en plead guilty to it, for I have given the promise demanded.”

“You would have been very wrong to refuse it, my dear sir, and the more so as I shall be always near to act as your secretary,” said Clara.

“True, my love! This is a great comfort, and I assure you I did not forget it when I gave the promise. But though you will be able, my dear child, to do every thing for me in the way of notes and letters, unfortunately, you can do nothing in the way of business, and all this sort of work must therefore of necessity stand over till I am in a fitter state to transact it. Your office, dearest Clara, must begin directly, for you must sit down at once, and let Dalrymple know the state I am in, and the discipline to which I am obliged to submit. To him I dare say this will be a

great convenience, for it is evident he does not think it worth while to come to town for the mere purpose of settling the trifle between us; but to me the delay is a dreadful bore; for with my regular habits of business, it is the greatest possible annoyance to me to suffer any thing of the kind to remain unconcluded a moment longer than is necessary. Write to Dalrymple, will you, my dear,—directly?"

It would be difficult very precisely to define the feelings with which Clara sat down to perform this task. To put off any thing which gave her the chance of seeing Dalrymple was decidedly painful. And to a consciousness of this she pleaded guilty to herself rather more readily than might have been expected from her maiden dignity. Was it that she preferred accounting for the repugnance she felt at telling Dalrymple that the settlement between him and her father was to be delayed to any cause rather than acknowledge to herself the vague, dim, shadowy, and indistinct, but most terrible suspicion that this delay, however desirable, was not absolutely necessary? That some such thought was in her head is most certain. And it is certain, too, that she felt faint and sick at heart as the hateful idea pierced through all the obstacles she could muster to repel it. Yet, with all this, she could not find herself, pen in hand, about to subscribe her name to a paper which was to meet the eye of Dalrymple, without a thrilling emotion that had, after all, more of pleasure than of pain in it.

The letter was sent, and received a civil, cold, and cautious answer. There was sorrow for Sir George's illness—indifference concerning the delay—gratitude for her obliging attention in writing to him—but not a line, a word, a syllable which showed the slightest interest in the person he addressed. Below the signature, and the place where postscripts are usually accommodated, there was an erasure—a neat, careful, and, alas! most effectual erasure. How many moments did Clara waste in endeavouring to discover any single word that might have been written there? It was all in vain! Not a single letter could be decyphered; and yet the very sterile fact, that something had been written there which he did not, upon reflection, deem it proper, or advisable, or prudent to send, gave her a degree of pleasure which proved too well that she was any thing but "fancy free."

Three days after the receipt of Mr. Dalrymple's answer, the family set off for Brighton, where Sir George Meddows recovered his health with such wonderful rapidity that he determined upon remaining there till the first week in December.

Ill as he was before he left town, he had a long conversation

with Charles Chesterfield, in which it was settled that the young man should for the present continue in London, that he might not be interrupted in his rapid advance towards fame by withdrawing himself from the immediate protection of Mr. Marchmont, but he was invited, when the London season should decline, to pay a visit to his friends at Brighton, and moreover Sir George exacted as a promise from him that he would not return home without letting him know of it.

“Hitherto, my dear boy,” he said, with every demonstration of affection, “hitherto my most sanguine predictions respecting you have been fully verified, and I naturally feel anxious that you should take no step now, without my concurrence, for I have great things in my head for you, Charles. I shall not be satisfied till I see you established, not only as a popular author, and a favourite lion, but also as a gentleman of easy fortune, and feeling yourself perfectly on an equality with all with whom you associate. But you must not let your account with Mr. Marchmont run on too long. He has been so remarkably kind in taking you about with him, that it would not have done to press him for money just at first, but I hope you will come to Brighton, Charles, with your pockets full. Party-giving will be very soon over now, and then you must speak to him seriously about settling with you.”

The young man promised to bear in mind every thing he said, and they parted with greater appearance of affection and confidence than either party had ever exhibited before. But though Charles most gratefully felt at the very bottom of his heart that he owed all the greatness he had achieved to Sir George Meddows having brought him up to London, he meant not to be so sensibly obedient as to run the risk of offending the man upon whom his continued appearance before the eyes of the public depended. He felt sure that for the rest of his life it was impossible he should ever want money, and remembering how rapidly the months were passing away, and how very soon he should be in possession of his fortune, he smiled at the idea of dunning the Regenerator for a few contemptible tens, when he should so speedily be lord of many hundreds.

Notwithstanding a great deal of very kind feeling on both sides, Miss Meddows and her rustic admirer actually parted rather with pleasure than pain. The young lady felt inexpressibly relieved by an arrangement which served to prove that her father had no intention whatever of borrowing his little fortune; and Charles, though still thinking her the very personification of all loveliness, and though still very comfortably persuaded that he had found considerable favour in her eyes, nevertheless saw her depart with

satisfaction. For Charles was entangled ; and the friendly confidential tone in which she often talked to him, and enquired after his “whereabouts” and pursuits, embarrassed him sometimes exceedingly. He did not like to tell Miss Meddows that Mrs. Sherbourne wept upon his bosom whenever he visited her after a whole day’s absence, and that if he had remained two without seeing her, he should have almost feared for her life. Nor would he have had the least satisfaction in mentioning that he had already paid 19*l.* 17*s.* 4*d.* for a variety of little things which she had longed to receive from his hands. Still less perhaps would he have had any pleasure in stating to her, in reply to her friendly predictions of his being, by and by happily settled in the country, that Mrs. Sherbourne had recently declared that if he did not make her his wife as soon as he came of age, she should decidedly commit suicide. Upon the whole, therefore, Charles handed her into her carriage without that little pang at the heart which is often felt when those part who have found pleasure in being together—even when no “love passages” have occurred between them.

Left at perfect liberty to do what he liked, and to go where he chose, without even the slight restraint occasioned by the passing questions—“Where did you spend your evening?” or “whom have you seen to-day?” our hero may be supposed to have felt himself very comfortably at ease ; but in this case, as in many others, the obvious inference would not be the true one. Like St. Paul, he found his freedom to be of a very doubtful nature, and often did it happen to him that “what he would that did he not,” and *vice versa*. There are no chains, perhaps, more galling, and few so strong, as those twined round and round and round a very young man by such women as Mrs. Sherbourne. Their force consists not either in their tightness or tenuity, but in the tangled nature of the meshes into which the light links are thrown, forming bonds utterly inextricable to unskilled hands, and demanding more courage to cut asunder than is often found in the class of persons chiefly subjected to their thralldom, till a good deal of lingering suffering has made them desperate.

Many a diplomatist, accounted passing skilful in his trade, might have taken a lesson from Mrs. Sherbourne’s method of managing her *relations* with the various and often conflicting interests with which she had to deal. It was absolutely necessary for her well doing and well being, that Mr. Marchmont, who continued to pay her frequent visits, should perceive that she was gradually and gloomily approaching day by day to the moment that was to be for her “the end of all here,” when, by the unflinching action of her steadfast will and ready hand, she should “put off this mortal

coil," and place in his hands the marketable commodity of a gay life's record, with the piquant blasphemy of self-destruction at the end of it.

To Chesterfield, whose visits were not only frequent, but daily, it was equally necessary to show herself full of life and love, of hope and joy—with no other malady than the sweet torment caught from Cupid's dart, and no deeper sorrow than his caresses could assuage and his devotion cure. From "her dear Public," and her friends at large, both these states of mind were to be concealed with quite as much care as they were respectively to be exhibited to the individuals already mentioned; yet all these seemingly incompatible duties she performed regularly, steadily, and effectually, without even permitting either to interfere with the others.

If by some *mal-à-propos* accident, absolutely unavoidable, Mr. Marchmont and Charles met at her lodgings, she contrived to make each feel, without any mixture of doubt on the subject, that she most heartily wished the other away. When she smiled and spoke with gentle gaiety to Chesterfield, Marchmont immediately comprehended that she was exerting a most extraordinary degree of resolution in order to conceal from him the inward darkness of her melancholy death-desiring soul; and when she permitted a glance, gloomy as a midnight storm, to darken her fair face as she looked at her literary executor, her youthful lover sympathized with the unconquerable feeling which made her deem any interruption to a *tête-à-tête* with himself intolerable.

If, as it often happened, she found herself *en face* to both, and to an admiring circle besides, she varied her trickery from vivacity, which, while it enchanted the crowd, caused secret admiration at her extraordinary self-control in her two initiated friends—to a languor, which, though it made her recline with eyes half shut, and a flacon at her nose, permitted her to assume every possible position by which a foot, a hand, and a world of drooping ringlets could be best displayed, and at the same time it gave occasion to the most satisfactory commentaries in the minds of those more particularly concerned as to the feelings so evidently overpowering to her.

And thus the London season wore away, till nobody seemed to have courage enough to confess that they intended to remain in it for another hour—yet some few persons were obliged to linger there, nevertheless; and Mr. Marchmont, Mrs. Sherbourne, and Charles Chesterfield were among them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Charles Chesterfield is worse off than he thinks for in many ways—A Lecture on the Art of Reviewing—Charles rebels against *The Regenerator*, and is banished—Various Love Passages—Financial Difficulties—An amorous *Dénouement*.

OF the trio thus debarred from tasting the sweet breath of summer, Charles Chesterfield was the least discontented; for the moral infliction had as much of novelty for him in many respects now, as when the heat, the dust, and the din were hallowed by fashion. Vauxhall appeared to him the realisation of the most brilliant fables of the Arabian Tales, Kensington gardens a royal Paradise, Richmond a courtly Arcadia, and the river Thames an unceasing regatta, on which the barge of Cleopatra seemed ever before him, when the Lord Mayor or any of his golden compeers “disported on its azure wave.”

It certainly did happen, sometimes, that the poor lad felt exceedingly tired of Mrs. Sherbourne, and her engrossing love; but he was too young and too gentle-hearted to let this feeling keep him away from her, as he truly believed it would break her heart if he did. The lady, however, like most others, was as quick to perceive the fading of the passions she inspired as the growth of them, and was perfectly aware that the young poet was tired to death of her. But this was a matter of the most perfect indifference. As long as it was certain that in a few months he would be in possession of four thousand pounds in ready money, so long it was certain would her fond attachment last; and the only question in her mind was whether it would be wisest to marry, and make him responsible for her debts, or lead him to elope with her to the continent, and there enjoy, as Mrs. Chesterfield, the satisfaction of expending the money, without shackling herself by any ceremony which might render the connection troublesome when it was gone.

There were many reasons which led her decidedly to prefer the latter course, and there is little doubt she would have adopted it, had she not perceived such decided symptoms of recovered reason in the young man as led her to doubt her power of inducing him to take the spirited course she meditated. It was then that she blessed the forethought which had taught her, when his madness was at its height, to extract from him a note containing an explicit promise of marriage. She now examined this with very technical exactness, and, finding it perfectly satisfactory, relaxed so visibly in the *exigeante* demonstrations of her attachment that Charles gradually began to fancy that he had recovered his liberty; and, rejoicing in the idea that his chains were falling

from him by degrees, his spirits rose, he felt his poetic Pegasus, which of late had drooped and stumbled, again curveting under him, and determined to attempt some higher flight than he had yet dared. He omitted his usual call in Mount-street, and repaired to the dark and dusky second-floor of his friend Marchmont.

He found the Regenerator rather gloomily plodding over the pages which were to constitute his next number.

"Oh!—It is you, Chesterfield, is it?" he said, as the door opened, and the gay countenance of the half-enfranchised prisoner appeared before him. "I am glad to see you—and you look, too, as if you were up to every thing. See here! these tales of yours are capitally good, and quite in the right style of passion. Too mystical to be generally attacked as *trop fort*, and yet sufficiently Byronic to please. But I think we have gone on long enough with them; and now I want you to start off upon something perfectly new."

"You could not say any thing that I should better like to hear, Mr. Marchmont," replied Charles eagerly. "I have been meditating for two or three days past on a narrative poem that I should like to write in numbers. Quite new that, isn't it?"

"Yes, upon my soul, and devilish good too; and if you will let me go shares, half-and-half, I'll undertake to find a publisher for you. But this won't help on the Mag., you know; I must get something out of you for that. I have just been thinking that you have never yet tried your hand at reviewing. I want to take 'Cassandra' and the 'Book to Broadstairs,' and therefore I must get you to run me off a few spirited notices on all the books set down in this list."

"I have no objection to try my hand as a reviewer," replied Charles, rather gravely. But, let the works be as light as they may, there is a terribly long quantity of reading here, particularly as I have just taken it into my head that I should like to begin something else."

On hearing these words, Marchmont burst into a violent fit of laughter. "What a greenhorn you still are, Chesterfield, notwithstanding all the trouble I have taken to enlighten your ignorance. Do you really, truly, and *bonâ fide* believe that the almighty confraternity of we read the books that they review?" said he. "A pretty life they would lead. Do you really believe this?"

"Yes, certainly I do," replied the young man, "for I don't see very well how they can escape it."

"Don't you, *mon cher*?—Then I will show you," said Marchmont, opening one of the teeming repositories of his writing-desk,

and drawing thence a sheet of paper. "Here is a list; read it aloud, and you shall have my commentary afterwards."

Charles obeyed, opened the paper, and read as follows:

"1st. *Thoughts on a future state of existence*.—Execrable. Bigotry. Intolerance. Nineteenth century. Stumbling-block in the progress of thought. To be done savagely, but jocosely.

"2nd. *The Tyranny of Passion; or, Absolution by Right Divine*.—Admirable. Courage of truth. Strength of argument. Irresistible reasoning. First-rate talent. Commanding intellect. To be done in a high transcendental tone of enthusiasm.

"3rd. *Lucinda, or the Lost and Found*.—Unequalled felicity of style. Mingled purity and warmth. Interest that never flags. Decidedly the most popular novel of the season.

"4th. *Mary Anne*.—The author of this work well known, but little valued. Total deficiency of enlarged views. Contracted mind. Behind the age. Neither interest, excitement, nor philosophy."

Charles laid down the paper, and then said, "I comprehend you now. You have read and passed judgment on these works yourself; but, being pressed for time, you wish me to embody your thoughts, thus succinctly expressed, in articles of the usual length."

"You are just about two-thirds right, and one-third wrong, Mr. Chesterfield. I have decidedly passed judgment on these works, but most assuredly I have not read them; and I do wish you to embody my thoughts, as you call it, in articles of the usual length."

"You don't mean to tell me," cried Charles, "that this omnipotent business of reviewing, of which I have heard you speak in language so sublime, as of a power which, though wielded in secret, might vie with the bolts of Jove in its irresistible greatness,—you don't mean to tell me that it is all humbug, and that books are admired or condemned solely by chance, without having been ever read by the reviewer at all?"

"By chance?—O no! my dear fellow, not by chance, most certainly. God forbid that I should belong to so extremely childish and unprincipled a community. To review books by chance would be about as absurd as I hold the occupation of the great trimestre critics to be, who, for the most part, do, it is said, actually read the books they review. Chance has much less to do with us than with them. They may chance to be in a good humour, or they may chance to be in a bad one; they may be full of wine, or full of pudding, and moreover they may be utterly incapable of judging wisely in any state, and so be pretty sure of blundering in all. But such tripping and stumbling can never

happen among our set ; our principles are immutable, our judgments ever clear ; all we require to know is the name of the author in all cases where the name is known, or the principles in which he writes where it is not. This is sailing by a compass that cannot fail us, my dear Chesterfield, and is an occupation as much superior to the pitiful employment of dissecting, analysing, and pretending to understand and judge the magnificent mass of literature poured forth by our groaning press, as turning a thousand spindles by a steam-engine is superior to the meddling labours of a grandam's distaff."

"Your system may be very convenient, Mr. Marchmont," replied Charles ; "but you must forgive me if I say that I think its justice rather questionable."

"Forgive you, my dear fellow ! Never doubt it ; when a set act in concert, the discord of mere opinion is of no consequence ; but as a matter of argument, I must point out that you are utterly mistaken in fancying there is any injustice in our system. Man to be great, Chesterfield, must never reason but on generalities ; and if you view this subject *en grand* you will perceive a beautiful balance in the system, self-acting, and ever equitable, which places it incomparably higher, in a moral point of view, than any which rests on the wayward foundations of any human judgment. All the sages that have ever lived, whether sacred or profane, agree in proclaiming the fallibility of the judgment of man. We altogether escape from the mischiefs incident on this fallibility, for we do not permit the blundering faculty to have any thing to do with the matter."

Charles felt a movement somewhat resembling anger as he listened to the scoffing jestings of this ambushed stabber. But he was in high spirits, and after the struggle of a moment, permitted himself to laugh heartily at his patron's avowed rascality, and then said, "But, Mr. Marchmont, leaving morality quite out of the question, which I think will be the safest way of treating the subject, I give you my word and honour that I should be quite incapable of working on this steam-engine principle. I can fancy it just possible that by dint of patient and attentive reading, I might be capable of concocting an honest sort of a review which should give a tolerably fair idea of the work under discussion. But how to make any thing out of those dashing rules of yours I don't know ; so don't you think I had better set about something else?"

"Nonsense ! if you mean to get on, you must conceive yourself capable of every thing. Besides, in this case, you are perfectly mistaken about the difficulty ; nothing is so easy."

"It may be so to you," persisted Charles ; "but I am sure I

should never be able to string sentences together by which I really meant nothing. I really have no talent for it."

"Had you not already achieved a reputation for great cleverness, Mr. Chesterfield, I certainly should take the liberty of bestowing the epithet of dull upon you.

'Ay, duller must thou be than the fat weed
That rots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,'

if you *really* find no meaning in the style of reviewing which I have done myself the honour of pointing out to you. But I think not that you are quite so obtuse as you would seem. So we will drop this fanciful discussion on meaning and no meaning, if you please, and come to the plain matter of fact, that I want half-a-dozen critical notices *done to order*, that is, in the spirit (as to praise or blame) which is marked against each. In point of reason, and so forth, I will read, if you will give me leave, two that I ran off just before going to bed last night. I give you my honour that I know nothing of either work beyond the name and *colour* of the respective authors. The first is a novel called 'Hope;' the author is a well-known Conservative, and one of the most troublesome observers in existence; but as he is accounted a very moral man, I treat him, as you shall see, very gently."

Mr. Marchmont then read as follows:—

"The reviewer's task would be a very delightful one did justice and integrity permit the passing over all that is valueless in literature, and marking only such productions as excite our sympathy, amuse our fancy, or elevate our faculties. Nothing could be more delightful than sitting down, as it were, to descant with the author on things terrestrial and divine, in such a spirit as should enable us to distil precious balm from both. But alas! this may not be. Our duty is imperative, and, turning our reluctant eyes from pages redolent of pure philosophy, we are often obliged, as in the present instance, to waste our midnight lamp, while pursuing the irksome and most repugnant task of pointing out the maudlin sophistry of an affected morality, which has only to be received as earnest, in order to quench the glorious light of human freedom for ever.

"Happily in this case, as in many others, there is an antidote accompanying the poison. The dullness of the 'Hope' which these seemingly endless pages open to us, must weigh heavier on the hapless reader's spirit than despair itself; and we have only to say, 'Go! read, and repent the rashness which set you to the task!' in order to do the fullest justice both to the author and the public. The work is in three volumes, and neatly printed; but it would be well if this stickler for order (if revengeful Heaven, in punishment of our sins, permit him to perpetrate another

book) would for the future divide his chapters somewhat more equally.'

"That is the sort of thing, Chesterfield. There is nothing particularly difficult in it, is there?"

"The principal difficulty, in my opinion," replied Charles, gravely, "consists in finding in one's heart sufficient cruelty and injustice for condemning a work that one has never read. For all you know to the contrary then, this 'Hope' may be one of the ablest works ever written?"

"Oh! for example, now," exclaimed Marchmont, laughing, "I have the most conscientious conviction that every thing written by a Conservative must of necessity be as dull as death—so much for my justice. And to prove that my nature is not altogether cruel, I will now read my review of 'William Watkins; or, The Convict Footman.' It is written by one of the most intimate friends I have in the world. And the fine fellow gives capital good feeds too. It would be a devilish pity if his books did not sell. Now listen.

"We hail these volumes as the advent of a new era in the history of man. If any proof were wanting of the steadily progressive movement towards perfection, which may be traced in all authentic records of the human mind, it might be found in the nicely graduated and regular improvement in all works of imagination, from the earliest ages to the present day. How, by degrees have the wild unnatural vagaries of poetry assumed the thrilling interest of reality, and from idly speculating of things unknown, become the faithful chronicler of truth and nature! Homer sang of gods and demigods, of heroes and deeds unknown to earth. Him Virgil followed, and with wing more tame, grew somewhat nearer truth. Then came the monstrous visions of the Tuscan bard, who madly dreamed a hell, and peopled it with human monsters, begot by his own spleen. Fables of chivalry came next, far nearer life, yet still it was life only of the few, not of the million. Of the growing crowd, denser and denser still, who painted life on stilts, through every successive age, yea, ever coming nearer and nearer to the things that be, it would be bootless to speak, for where are the pages that could hold the list? But through them all, where can we light on one who, bravely trampling down the worn-out boundaries that have hemmed us up within the narrow space assigned to noble deeds, and lofty thoughts, and graceful imagery, has dared to choose his heroes from the common herd? At last, and only now, we have reached this highest point of human interest. The author of 'The Convict Footman' has come in the fullness of time to teach us of what clay we truly are, and what the pulses which beat the

strongest throughout the great majority—sublime in their vast multitude—and forming the majestic living mass, of which kings and heroes make but an atom in the awful whole. This work stands foremost, high, and alone, in the van of all the labours of modern intellect. It is needless to say more. The march of mind, that indomitable ever-accelerating movement, so gloriously bearing us forward in these latter days, unchecked by any craven fear of whither it may lead, will not fail to convey all men there, where the trumpet of innovation sounds the loudest, and the unshackled soul bounds fiercest forward. We will not add another word, well assured that our awakened countrymen need only to be told that such pages exist, in order to make them start forward in a noble strife, each straining to be first to seize upon them !’

“There, Mr. Chesterfield! The writing an article upon ‘The Convict Footman’ is a task I would have yielded to no man, but you perceive that I can praise when I choose it.”

“At any rate, Mr. Marchmont, you have read this work,” said Charles.

“Devil a line of it, *mon cher*. It is quite enough for me to know who wrote it. Now, then, I think I have given you a lesson in the art of reviewing that you will remember as long as you live. Don’t forget the list—take it with you, and let me have the notices as early as you can.”

“I do not think I shall ever succeed in this line of composition, Mr. Marchmont,” said Charles, preparing to leave the room, “and I would rather not attempt it.”

“Hoity toity! my young gentleman! Well, sir, be it as you will—only at this moment I have really no more time to spare, and therefore, very respectfully, I must beg to wish you a good morning.”

Chesterfield looked at him for a moment, meditating on the number of pages which he had filled for him during the last four or five months, and felt much inclined to request that he would be pleased to pay him for the same; but shyness, or pride, or a mixture of both, led him to think that he should prefer making the demand by letter; he therefore silently returned his patron’s bow, and retired.

As Chesterfield pursued his homeward way, and meditated on the scene which had just past, he felt that he had quarrelled with Marchmont, though no hostile word had passed between them. During the last few weeks, the town being empty, and the necessity of appearing with something like the exterior of a gentleman having vanished with his elegant friends, Mr. Marchmont had indulged himself in a sort of *laissez aller* which had gone far towards disenchanting his young disciple.

It had seemed to Charles, on his first introduction to him, that he filled precisely the situation in society which was the *beau idéal* of his own ambition, and for several months the delusion lasted; for, during these months, the Regenerator had still continued to appear before him as the brightest star of the brightest hemisphere he had ever contemplated. But the aspect of things was changed. The rurally-nurtured young man might see much to admire in the full-dressed arbiter of taste, leaning with easy *nonchalance* on Mrs. Gibson's chimney-piece, or lounging on the sofa of Mrs. Somebody-else, or seated in the post of honour at a gay dinner-table; and, in each case, uttering his *ipse dixits* with the assured confidence of certain success: nothing could be more natural than that he should gaze, and long to do the like, especially as all this greatness and renown flowed solely from his literary pre-eminence,—a species of distinction to which Charles aspired with sanguine hope, perpetually nurtured by fondly repeating to his heart, "*anch' io son autore!*" But with all this readiness to admire the great master in his butterfly state during the spring and summer, it by no means followed that when he appeared anew in his autumnal grub condition, the same feelings should follow him. The Mr. Marchmont of the drawing and dining rooms of "the intellectual," and the Mr. Marchmont of dirty chop-houses and steamy divans, bore no resemblance whatever to each other; and the heart of Charles Chesterfield reproached him with no inconstancy when he confessed to himself that the editor of *The Regenerator* was by no means the sort of person he had taken him for.

When, therefore, this personage suddenly thought proper to treat the young man in the high and mighty style above described, the young man felt himself in no humour to bear it; and conscious that he had taken no pains to conceal the displeasure and disgust it inspired, became perfectly aware, before he reached his lodgings, that the animated page in his existence which recorded his admiring friendship for Marchmont, was turned over, and closed for ever.

The proverb says that "kissing goes by favour," which, being interpreted, probably means that we caress that for which we have a fancy, and when the fancy turns into another direction, the kissing turns into another direction too. Charles began to feel impatient for the promised invitation from Brighton. He felt sick of London and all that was in it; and though quite determined not to turn his steps homeward till he had published something on his own account, he could not keep his thoughts from travelling in that direction; and they led so often towards Bessy, and the turf seat in the orchard, that when the image of the

impassioned Mrs. Sherbourne did happen to obtrude, it brought a sort of shudder with it which, could it have been witnessed by that lady, would have raised the value of a certain imprudent bit of paper in her possession several hundred per cent.

But the invitation from Brighton was still delayed; and, notwithstanding the indispensable visits to Mount-street, the days and weeks would have seemed almost interminable had it not been for the "Narrative Poem, in monthly numbers," upon which he had begun to employ himself. No callings on Mr. Marchmont, either for business or pleasure, broke in upon his leisure, for, though steadfastly determined to apply in a peremptory manner for the money which he considered due to him, he still delayed doing so, from youthful and very natural dislike to a task so perfectly new, and in its nature so extremely prosaic and disagreeable. The hundred pounds lent him by Sir George were not yet gone; he had, therefore, no necessity to prick the sides of his intent, and at length determined not to trouble himself about it till he had received his expected summons from Brighton, at which time he determined to pay all the little bills he owed; and as these, though he knew they could not be much, would certainly require all the ready money he had left, he thought that it would be the right time to make his demand.

Meanwhile his poem went on rapidly; three parts out of the proposed twelve were already completed, and so well was he pleased with what he had written, that he began to think it might be a good plan to show it to a publisher even in this unfinished state. But he had no one with whom he could consult on the subject, and doubts of his own judgment still rendered him timid. Marchmont was out of the question; of him he had neither heard nor seen any thing since the day he declined to undertake the reviewing of works which he had never read. In all literary discussions with his fair friend in Mount-street, it was always her productions, and not his own, which formed their subject-matter, and he had a sort of prophetic conviction that notwithstanding all her ardent affection for him, she would find the perusal of his verses a bore.

"I will ask her, nevertheless," thought he, after once more glancing his eye over the three first cantos. "If they really have the merit I fancy, she must receive pleasure from the perusal; and, perhaps, after all, I do her injustice in doubting it. For though she certainly is a good deal taken up with what she does herself, she can hardly be indifferent to so important an undertaking as this by one whom she loves, alas! but too well, both for his peace and her own. Poor Sylvia! I am too apt, I fear, to judge her harshly!"

Under the influence of such thoughts as these, Charles hastily rolled up his manuscript and set off for the dwelling of Mrs. Sherbourne. "Oh! it is you, is it?" said the lady, resuming her recumbent position on the sofa, which she had abandoned when she thought the knock might have announced another. "What on earth could have made you knock so queerly, Charles? It was not the least like your countrified rat, tat, tat!"

"Then I hope I improve, Sylvia!" he replied. "But I think I can guess why the knock was different. It may be that it was influenced by the knocking in my bosom, for I am bringing to you what I have hardly courage to show, and yet it is something that I cannot help flattering myself you will like."

"My own Charles! Ah! that is so like you! Tell me then, my best loved friend, what is it that you have brought me?" cried Mrs. Sherbourne, again springing hastily from the sofa.

"Oh dear! How unlucky!" exclaimed Chesterfield, *naïvement*. "Then now I am sure you will not like it, because you will be disappointed, Sylvia."

"You know I hate riddles, Mr. Chesterfield; if you have really brought me any thing, do let me see it at once."

"It is not a present, Mrs. Sherbourne," said Charles gravely. "It is only the three first cantos of a poem which I am writing."

"Well, Chesterfield, I really must say that by way of a lover you are the very least obliging person that I ever encountered. I don't at all mean on account of your not bringing me any of the trifles which you happen to know I want. Of course, you will do as you like, and according to your natural temper and inclination in that respect. But I do think, that your first saying that you had brought me something that I should like, and then confessing that it was nothing but a parcel of rigmarole verses, is rather too bad, and looks exceedingly as if you came with a deliberate determination to plague me."

"Then I had certainly better take myself off again, Sylvia; with such thoughts in your head, you are not likely to make a kind critic."

"Oh! as for that, I am just as likely to be kind now as at any other time. But the truth is I hate verses, and nothing on earth bores me so much as being read to."

"Well then, I will wish you good morning," said Charles, returning the roll of manuscript to his pocket, and taking his hat. Mrs. Sherbourne looked a little alarmed.

"You are not going to be sulky, Charles, because I don't happen to like listening to verses—are you?" demanded she, in the tone of a gentle but much-injured person. "Alas! if you so easily lose your temper, dearest friend, may it not reasonably frighten

me for the fate of our future days? But, indeed, indeed, my dearest Charles, it will not do for you to make a practice of reading to me every thing you write. You know, *Caro*, that your most distinguished faculties are facility and copiousness; then imagine, just imagine, what it would be! I too writing so constantly myself! I do hope, to Heaven, Charles, that it is not your intention to read to me eternally all your own compositions?"

"Assuredly not, Mrs. Sherbourne," returned Charles, composedly; "yet I see not how my committing so great a folly, or abstaining from it, can greatly affect the fate, as you call it, of our future days, let my temper under the operation, or the abstaining from it, be what it may."

"I differ from you greatly there," replied the lady, with a gentle sigh, "for I consider every indication of habits and of temper as of the very first importance to persons circumstanced as we are. Is not domestic life made up of habits? And is not temper either the sun-beam or the storm that cheers or blasts existence?"

"Temper and habits, Mrs. Sherbourne, are unquestionably of great importance to all human beings; but not more so, I presume, to you and me, than to all the world beside," said Charles.

"I speak not, dear friend, in reference to any peculiarity in our individual natures, but to the relative position in which we stand to each other," she replied.

"Perhaps you are right; I think I understand you now, Mrs. Sherbourne," said he rather eagerly: "and I certainly agree with you in thinking that when persons, who have been fond of each other's society, mutually perceive such discrepancies of thought or feeling as may be likely to render future intercourse painful, they should be ready at once to acknowledge it—whether the discordant symptoms arise from a newly-acknowledged contrariety in their habits, or from tempers less equable than either or both had hoped to find, there can be no question that in both cases the wisest plan is to keep asunder for the future."

"Ah! petted and spoiled as you are, dearest, it must not startle me to hear you talk thus wildly. But no more of this! Go ramble, Charles, in the sweet shades of Kensington. There, haply, you will again

'Find your fair soul.'

I would not listen to your enemy, Charles, did he malign you, as you now seem to malign yourself. Go! petted one, go! Nor return to the ark of your rest, till you have found the olive-branch which you have so wantonly thrown away in quitting it."

Charles made no reply, but stood holding his hat suspended between his two hands, turning it round and round, very much

with the air of a scolded school-boy, who knew not what to say in excuse for some delinquency of which he had been found guilty.

“How exceedingly like a fool he looks,” thought Mrs. Sherbourne; “I shall have no need of his written promise, though I have got it; I shall only have to say, ‘We will go to church on Monday, deary,’ and on Monday to church we shall go.”

A sort of lambent smile played upon the lips of the fair widow as this thought arose, which degenerated into something very like a sneer, when the young man at last made his bow, and said “Good morning, Mrs. Sherbourne, I shall have the honour of calling on you again to-morrow morning.”

“And I shall have the honour of boxing your ears if you do not contrive to be more agreeable to-morrow morning than you have been this.” So saying, she resumed the occupation he had interrupted, and permitted him to leave the room without any further leave-taking.

“I must finish this folly, and at once,” thought Charles, as he stalked down the street with the air of a determined man. “I have been much to blame in suffering it to proceed so far—but though worried to death, I have never felt so heartily sick of her as to-day. Heartless creature! How false must be the caresses of a woman who has not patience to listen to the verses of the man she pretends to love! Oh! Bessy, Bessy! is it possible that I ever thought her affectation more attractive than thy sweet simplicity? I will see her to-morrow, and, please Heaven, it shall be for the last time.”

As to the very explicit declaration which she possessed of his intention to devote his life to her in the capacity of a husband, he had no more distinct recollection of it than of all the other amatory follies which had passed between them; and the idea of her having any legal claim upon him was quite as foreign from his thoughts as that the Bank of England was about to prosecute him for forgery. He felt, however, that notwithstanding the hollowness of all the professions of love which she had sighed forth into his ears, the falseness of which he considered fully proved by her refusal to listen to his poem, she had still no intention of restoring him to liberty, and he anticipated rather a disagreeable scene on the morrow, but was desperately determined to screw his courage to it. “When it is well over,” thought he, “I will write again to Bessy.”

The energy of character thus brought into action made him, on reaching his lodgings, decide upon writing without further delay to Mr. Marchmont, and he instantly did so in the following words:

“DEAR SIR,—As I expect shortly to be summoned by Sir George Meddows to join his family party at Brighton, I shall be obliged by your immediately settling with me for the various articles which I have furnished for your magazine. I enclose a list of these, together with the dates at which many of them have been already published, and also copies of the various memoranda which I have preserved of the conversations between us, in which you gave me instructions for the rest. If you will name any hour at which it would be convenient, I will do myself the honour of calling for the purpose of receiving your cheque for the money, and giving you my receipt for the same.

“I remain, dear sir, your faithful servant,

“CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.”

To this despatch he the next morning received, by the first delivery, the following letter:—

“SIR, I beg to assure you that it will never again be convenient for me to have any thing whatever to do with you. Your gross ignorance and unmitigated impertinence, as displayed in the last interview with which you favoured me, were quite sufficient to decide me against being troubled with any more such encounters. As to the pecuniary part of your epistle, I must presume it to have been written in jest. If you can show, however, any written document to which my name is appended, authorizing in the very slightest degree the preposterous claim made in your note, I give you my honour, as a gentleman, to abide by it—though perfectly certain that if any such document exists, it must have been given ‘in merry sport.’ Nevertheless, I repeat that if it do exist, I am ready to abide by it, as I always have done by every engagement into which I have entered into from the first moment of my coming into business up to the present hour. I cannot, however, thus take my final leave of you, sir, without giving you a hint that I hope may be useful; but I wish you to understand that I do this rather out of respect to the excellent lady who first presented you to my notice, than from any busy inclination to interfere in your affairs.

“Let me then remark to you, sir, that it is not the custom for the proprietors of any works, like that which I have the honour to conduct, to pay for such contributions as those received from you. Your total inexperience respecting all the principles upon which the modern literature of England is conducted has, I doubt not, left you ignorant of the fact, that a vast number of extremely clever writers not only contribute their productions gratis, but are constantly in the habit of paying for the gratifying appearance of their performances in print, either by certain sti-

pulated sums of money paid down, in proportion to the quantity inserted, or else, by the purchase of twenty, fifty, or a hundred copies of the work. I need hardly remind you, sir, that I have never required any thing of the kind from you ; a degree of liberality which I flatter myself will be duly appreciated by the estimable lady at whose request I first made acquaintance with you—and now, sir, nothing further remains for me to add, but that

“ I am your very obedient humble servant,

“ MARCHMONT.”

The state of mind into which young Chesterfield was thrown upon reading this letter was really terrible ; and the more so, because, from constitutional gentleness of disposition, his feelings, however irritated, never burst forth, and relieved themselves by any explosion of rage. What he now felt was not so much anger against Mr. Marchmont, as shame and despair for himself.

During the first moments of this bitter agony, he doubted between the torturing belief that all the lofty notions of his own powers, which for years had formed the great happiness of his life, were utterly vain and unfounded, and the conviction that Mr. Marchmont was a literary swindler, and most accomplished villain. Happily for his comfort, his mind did not balance long between the better and the worse hypothesis ; and so great was his mental relief, when at length he was cool enough to look back through the whole history of his connection with this “ distinguished man,” and to value him with tolerable justness at his worth, that it may be doubted if he had ever felt very much happier since his arrival in London than at the moment when he rationally enough came to the conclusion, that had his productions been nothing worth, Mr. Marchmont would not have taken the trouble to rob him of them.

He now recollected with deep interest and great satisfaction that not all his reiterated efforts had been able to induce Miss Meddows to invite the editor of *The Regenerator* to her drawing-room. “ Noble woman !” he exclaimed, with enthusiasm—“ What discernment, what dignity, has she displayed ! She will not think the worse of me when she hears that I too despise him, as heartily as she can do herself.”

At the age of Charles Chesterfield, strong emotions generally excite strong energies. The pertinacious style in which Mrs. Sherbourne had laid claim to him the day before, even at the very moment that she gave proof of the most heartless indifference, had, as we have seen, roused within him a pretty strong inclination to burst asunder the irksome bonds with which she had shackled him, and a lively remnant of the same sort of spirit now

determined him to battle stoutly—not against the fraudulent conduct of Mr. Marchmont—he really and truly despised him vastly too much to think of any thing of the kind—but against the sea of troubles which seemed to threaten him. There were still two months to elapse before he should be of age. He greatly disliked the idea of applying again to Sir George Meddows for assistance, and still more perhaps that of asking it from his good father. He was conscious of having been a little resolute and headstrong at the time that his London journey was in doubt, and he shrunk from the idea of confessing that it had cost much money, and brought no profit. Rather than encounter either alternative, he determined to see whether his rhymes could not stand him in some stead with an honester publisher than Mr. Marchmont; and as it still wanted two hours of the earliest time at which the charming Sylvia descended from the retirement of her sleeping-apartment, he set off, once more charged with his three cantos, in an opposite direction from Mount-street, in order to employ the interval in making a visit to Mr. ———.

The palpitation of the heart which seized him on entering the premises of this gentleman could not be said to arise from the agitation inseparable from a first *début*; for Charles had been an author, and, as he was assured, a very successful author, for months. Yet still, his present proceeding was sufficiently novel, and sufficiently important too, for the result of it to be no light matter. He found breath, however, to enquire for Mr. ———, and to desire that the card he presented might be delivered to him, with a request for a few moments' conversation.

He had waited a much shorter time than he expected, when the door opened, and the present arbiter of his destiny appeared. Nothing could be more courteous and gentlemanlike than the manner in which he was received; and though something slightly approaching to a smile passed across the countenance of Mr. ——— when Charles mentioned that he had been for some months engaged as contributor to *The Regenerator*, there was nothing in the least discouraging in the manner in which his manuscript was received. On the contrary, there appeared to be an evident intention not to dismiss it unexamined, from the manner in which Mr. ——— said, “You must allow us a day or two, Mr. Chesterfield—and when proper attention has been given to the subject, you shall hear from me.”

The vainest and most *exigeant* of young authors could ask no more than this; Charles felt perfectly satisfied, and after wasting an hour, not unpleasantly, in wandering about Hyde Park, and building all sorts of castles, possible and impossible, in the air, he presented himself for what he was determined should be the last

time at the door of Mrs. Sherbourne, and, being admitted, found that charming little person reading a novel, and sipping bohea.—She looked up, and, with an affected start, said,

“Ah! here already, *amico mio*? What a natural creature! Most assuredly you must be something of the lark species—and you carol, too, most sweetly—as we all know. Shall I offer you tea?”

“No, not any tea, I thank you, Mrs. Sherbourne. I breakfasted several hours ago.”

“Hours? *Cielo!* you positively make me tremble. But I hope you are not a tyrant, Charles? I hope you have no intention of making your poor little wife get up in the middle of the night, like yourself?”

“If I ever have a wife, Mrs. Sherbourne, I shall hope our taste and judgment will accord in this, as in all things else.”

“If you ever have a wife? O, Charles, what a phrase that is from you to me! Why, dearest, it was but last night that I was singing the old song,

‘The weary hours are almost past,
That part my love and me!’

When is it that you are to be of age, my beloved Charles? Believe me, I am incapable of tormenting you by any idle feeling, nor have I the slightest intention of delaying your happiness a single day beyond that on which you attain your majority.”

Mrs. Sherbourne’s complexion did not undergo the slightest change as she said this,—but poor Charles blushed like a rosebud. He did not forget his errand, however, and replied, in a voice that betrayed very little agitation—

“Mrs. Sherbourne, I greatly fear that we have mistaken each other.”

“As how, Mr. Chesterfield?” she demanded, fixing a steady eye upon him.

“It is possible that you may be only jesting, Mrs. Sherbourne; indeed I hope it is so;—for in truth I should be infinitely concerned did I believe that you had any serious idea of a marriage taking place between us.”

“Jesting, sir? jesting on such a subject as this, with the man to whom I have been solemnly affianced for the last three months? What means this frightful language? Are you mad?”

“Not now, Mrs. Sherbourne, whatever I may have been during the earlier days of our acquaintance. But this is a very idle discussion, and to me it is a very disagreeable one. I do not, and cannot, hold myself affianced to you, Mrs. Sherbourne, for nothing can be further from my thoughts and intentions than to make you my wife. I trust a much happier destiny awaits you than

that of becoming the bride of a man who is conscious of having no single point of sympathy with you. Let me at once wish you good morning—and may all happiness attend you.”

“I thank you kindly, sir, for your good wishes. But sit down again, if you please, Mr. Charles Chesterfield; I cannot consent to part with you quite so abruptly. Did you ever hear of such a thing as a written promise of marriage, Mr. Chesterfield?”

Charles turned as pale as death. A vague recollection shot through his brain of having, in answer to a playful and beguiling note of hers, called all the gods to witness that she should be his. Was it possible that this wild rhapsody had been preserved? Could it have been preserved purposely to bring in judgment against him, and destroy, by shameful exposure, and ruinous damages, all his hopes of happiness in life? The bare idea that this was possible almost turned him to stone.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Sherbourne looked in his face with the last smile she ever bestowed upon him, and, unlike most of her former ones, this last smile was produced without the slightest effort, being the genuine result of feeling herself greatly amused. “O, no! You do remember it then, do you, my *pastor fido*?” she said, withdrawing a little bag, which hung at her watch-chain, from the lock of a drawer in her writing-desk to which she was applying it. “Then I will not, at this moment, suffer the precious document to encounter the dangers of exposure.

‘Twas on a leaf—the wind it blew,
Away flew the leaf, and promise too!
Damon’s vows I always thought
Light as the leaf on which he wrote.’

But vows and leaf too, Mr. Chesterfield, may be preserved by a little prudent care, you see; and it was precisely because I suspected the *volage* nature of both, that I have kept them thus carefully enclosed within that cage.”

“Yes, I do remember the silly jest,” returned Charles, with a burst of inexpressible indignation. “Unworthy woman! Can you thus stand unblushingly before me, and avow the craft by which you would seek to entrap my honour and my peace. But think not that the law can be made the instrument of such a bare-faced plot as this. I fear you not, Mrs. Sherbourne.”

“Well, sir, we shall see,” she replied, with the most perfect *sang froid*. “I will not, however, permit you to leave me under the influence of a delusion that may lead you wrong, and eventually, perhaps, plunge you into difficulties, which it may still be in your power to avoid. I have already shown the letter containing your promise of marriage to a very able lawyer, who assures me that it is quite impossible for any jury to doubt about

it for a single instant. You had, therefore, better think calmly on the business, Mr. Chesterfield, before you drive me into court. I love you passionately; of that I am sure you cannot doubt: and it is because the unsophisticated sincerity of my nature has led me to permit others also to be aware of this my passionate attachment to you, that I feel compelled to enforce justice, if your own heart refuses to accord it. It is quite impossible that I should permit myself to be pointed at as the forsaken victim of a false-hearted country bumpkin! Think better of it, Mr. Charles Chesterfield. Let our wedding-day follow that on which you come of age, and depend upon it you will find yourself one of the happiest creatures in existence."

"As your husband, madam?" retorted the outraged young man, with bitterness. "But it is idle to bandy words thus. I must take my chance, and trust to the honesty and good sense of an English jury for protection."

"This then is your ultimatum, Mr. Chesterfield?"

"I mean it to be so, Mrs. Sherbourne; I trust that I now speak to you for the last time."

"Our personal intercourse may very likely not be frequent for the future. But you will hear of me through my lawyer, Mr. Chesterfield. And now, sir, you may go—and I wish you an extremely good morning."

Charles turned his head away that he might not see the detestable expression of her mocking countenance, and, without proffering another word, walked out of the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Miseries of the Hero reach their Climax—He escapes from London, and carries his Sorrows to Brighton.

THE remarkably sudden recovery of Sir George Meddows, in consequence of changing the air from London to Brighton, did not seem to give his daughter quite so much pleasure as might have been expected. As he regained his health and spirits she seemed to lose hers; and amidst the incessant gaiety into which her aunt and her father contrived to plunge, she resolutely kept herself apart, entering very little into company, and using her utmost influence to prevent their continuing the expensive habits of their London establishment.

Had not this sudden recovery of her father's health from his as strangely sudden illness been accompanied by the highest possible flow of spirits, Clara would decidedly have renewed her project of offering her little fortune in order to enable him to meet the claims of his ward; but though, unhappily, no doubt

whatever rested on her mind respecting the fictitious nature of his malady, and very little as to the occasion which gave rise to it, she could not but believe that from some source or other he was now certain of finding the means of exonerating himself from the embarrassment which had so pressed upon him; and, this being the case, she wisely determined to let things take their course, and reserve the sacrifice she was quite ready to make, till some new pressure arose, when it might be the means perhaps of bribing her unworthy parent into leaving England, and abandoning the ruinous course of life which she but too truly guessed he was leading.

Of Dalrymple, and the sudden termination of all intercourse between them, she strove to think as little as possible; but that little was enough to dim the lustre of her eye, and reduce the lovely contour of her perfect form to a degree of thinness that it was a pain to see. Though uniformly believing that he had never entertained for her any sentiment approaching to love, she could not but remember that the intercourse between them had at least amounted to an intimacy exceeding that of mere ordinary acquaintance, and that the sudden termination of it could not be merely accidental. That it was herself who had occasioned it—that it was a torturing paroxysm of jealousy which had thus driven him forth from a large circle of friends and acquaintance to the uplands and groves of his country residence, at a season when there were few living things besides flocks and herds to bear him company, never for an instant entered her thoughts. As little did she imagine that, by most unjust and unreasonable inference, she was suspected of being worldly-minded, because she had the misfortune of being surrounded by those who were so, and that her mind was deemed less pure and less noble than it appeared to be, because she had passed some years of her life out of England. That it would have been better for her to know all this cannot be doubted, as, in the first place, the injustice of it might have done something towards lowering the estimate she had formed, reaching very nearly to perfection, of one who judged her so harshly; and, in the second, she would no longer have pined under the sharp torment of believing that she was devoid of all attraction in the only eyes which she had ever desired should look upon her with favour. If it were her destiny ever to benefit either by the one or the other of these healing blessings, it was not to be during her residence at Brighton, for month after month of this weary interval wore away without the occurrence of a single circumstance likely to restore her peace of mind.

The manner of Mrs. Longuéville towards her was indeed some-

what changed for the better. Hitherto there had always seemed to be a sort of secret committee for ever sitting on all her acts and deeds, of which her father and aunt were the only members, but before whom evidence was continually brought by Josephine, Mrs. Longuéville's French maid, which produced perpetual annoyance to poor Clara. Every thing she wore, and every thing she did not wear; every thing she bought, and every thing she did not buy; all the persons she liked, and all the persons she did not like; and, in a word, every thing she did, and every thing she did not do, successively became cause of complaint, reproof, and restraint. But all this was greatly altered. It seemed as if Mrs. Longuéville's present tactics would have led her rather to hold committee with the daughter than the father; and had Clara so willed, she might have listened to a vast deal of "*triste raison*" on the subject of Sir George's thoughtless extravagance. But many feelings led her to check this love of conversation; clearly as she saw, and deeply as she deplored the contemptible character of her father, she had never breathed a thought on the subject, save to her own aching heart; and had she been compelled to do so, her aunt would have been the very last confidant she would have chosen. Not only did she believe her to have been the abetter of all his extravagance, and the direct cause of much of it, but she suspected that the frightful love of being unprincipled upon principle—the witnessing of which had, throughout her short sad life, constituted her chiefest sorrow—took its source in the calculating mind of her aunt, rather than in the harem-scarem brain of her father. It was not, therefore, very likely that she should listen with much cordiality to the hints she now constantly received of Mrs. Longuéville's exclusive attachment to herself—of her opinion that it would be better for all parties, if she and her niece were to put their incomes together, and return to Paris; one of the frequent insinuations against Sir George's honesty and honour, in all matters which concerned his pecuniary affairs.

In the midst of all these harassing feelings, Clara had well nigh forgotten the existence of Charles Chesterfield altogether; when one morning her father gaily tossed an open letter before her, saying, "Read that, Clara, and tell me if you can show cause why the petition therein contained should not be granted?"

The young lady laid down her work, took up the letter, and read the following epistle from her forgotten friend:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—Your great kindness to me, which I trust that I have done nothing to forfeit, induces me to take a very great liberty. When you left London, you were so good as to

say that you should wish me to pay you a visit at Brighton ; and, moreover, that you did *not* wish me to return home without consulting you. To this last injunction I have most strictly adhered, though, of late, I have wanted the counsel of kind friends on more occasions than one. At the present moment, in particular, I should be very glad to have the advantage of your advice on a circumstance that has occurred to me, of so unexpected a nature, that I feel totally at a loss how to act. May I then, Sir George, take the liberty of immediately leaving London for Brighton ?

“ I remain, your obedient and grateful servant,

“ CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.”

“ Poor fellow !” exclaimed Clara, “ I am afraid he has got into some scrape or other. Pray write very kindly to him, papa. I shall be very glad to see him.”

“ And so shall I too, Clara,” said the baronet. “ I had by no means forgotten him, I assure you. But as I have made up my mind not to leave this delightful place till after Christmas, I postponed the invitation which I promised him, in order that he might spend the beef-and-pudding season with us. I don’t mean to put him into separate lodgings here, Clara ; it was absolutely necessary in London, you know, but you shall see that I intend to pet him famously now. He is a monstrous good fellow. I will write to him instantly, and in a style that shall make him come down as gay as a lark.”

The answer written by Sir George to his favoured *protégé* was, in effect, the most affectionate and obliging possible ; assuring him that the only reason for his not having written before, was his persuasion that it would be best to let him choose his own time for leaving London, concluding with a most kind message from Clara, and a cordial recommendation to him to lose no more time, but to make his appearance among them as speedily as possible.

In a postscript, Sir George commissioned his young friend to bring down with him a dozen pair of white riding-gloves ; ditto, ditto, for evening wear ; a couple of black satin cravats ; a pint bottle of *esprit de rose* ; a box of the finest cigars, and a set of the best possible razors ; adding, that if there was any difficulty about finding ready money to pay for these trifles, his best way would be to take the letter to Howel and James’s, where he would find no difficulty in getting all these articles, or any thing else in the world that he might happen to want. “ I am not quite sure,” he added, “ that they keep cigars, but they will be able to put you in the way of getting them.”

Chesterfield found this letter, together with another brought by the *petite poste*, lying on his table, on returning from one of his long solitary rambles in Kensington Gardens. He had more than once resolutely determined that *nothing* should prevent his completing his poem, and that not even the anxiety he felt for Mr. ——'s opinion of the portion of it placed in his hands should induce him to suspend his pen; but alas! the young poet found his genius less obedient to his will than he had expected. It was in vain that he sat down before his desk; the docile paper and the ready ink seemed mocking him with their obedient willingness to come together, for he had no energy to wield the pen that was to unite them. His hero, his heroine, and all the subsidiary groups that had begun so gracefully to weave themselves into the harmonious maze of his fable, now rose before him like the dim ghosts of his late bright imaginings, seeming to stand all pale and passionless, and as if unable to pronounce a single word beyond the awful adjuration—

“Leave us—leave us to repose!”

While the only faculty of his mind retaining power to act was that of conjecture, which ceased not to bring before him, in most feverish profusion, every possible and impossible answer from Mr. ——, who throughout all these nervous nights and days haunted his mind's eye as the incarnation of his destiny. While in this miserable state, his greatest relief was to walk for hours together in the forsaken shades of Kensington; and what would have become of him had London been full, and the Gardens in fashion, it is impossible to say. So completely had these literary hopes and fears taken possession of his mind that Mrs. Sherbourne herself, as well as her threatened prosecution, completely went out of his head for hours together, and, had she not addressed the following concise note to him, it is probable that ere long he would not have thought of it for more than a minute at a time. But these lines aroused him; and it was upon the receipt of them that he despatched the letter given above to Sir George Meddows.

“CHARLES CHESTERFIELD!—Think well what you are about before you drive a fond and faithful woman to despair. I adore you, Charles, as fondly as ever! Much too fondly, alas! to remember the cruelty of your conduct at our last dreadful meeting one moment after you give me reason to believe that you wish me to forget it. But though I still thus frankly avow the tenderness of my feelings, I owe it to myself to tell you that this tenderness will never make me abject; and that, if I hear not from you as a lover, you will hear from my attorney of your broken vows.

“I live as thou usest me,

“SYLVIA SHERBOURNE.”

The first glance showed Charles that, of the two letters which awaited him, one was from Sir George Meddows, and the other from an unknown correspondent. It was this he seized upon, for he knew that, in all probability, it contained the judgment of one whose word in such matters was very nearly fate. But though he held it in his hand, he could not open it, though for the last five days every hour had appeared like two, because he so eagerly longed for it; now that it was within his grasp, and that no obstacle sterner than a bit of wax kept him from the only information in all the world that was worth having, he had not the courage to meet it. But this breathless, trembling, hot, and cold condition was not one which could long be endured; in a sudden paroxysm of bold impatience the cover was torn asunder, and thrown aside, and Mr. ——'s note in legible characters remained in his hand wide open, and staring him in the face.

“Now then!” said Charles, desperately; and without further delay, read as follows:—

“SIR,—The verses which you have been so obliging as to submit to our perusal have great merit, and show a very happy invention, and much facility. But I am sorry to say, that in the present state of the trade it will not be in our power to undertake the speculation of publishing them.

“I remain, sir, your obedient servant,

“_____.

“P.S.—The MS. is left with a clerk, and will be delivered to your order.”

No heroine ever more literally sank into her chair, than did Charles Chesterfield after perusing these lines. Poor fellow! The pang was indeed a keen one. For about ten minutes he sat perfectly immovable, and firmly believed himself to be the most unhappy man in existence. During this short but terrible interval, the threats of Mrs. Sherbourne, which had hitherto given him very little concern, made him actually shudder, and, striking his forehead with his clenched fist, he exclaimed rather theatrically, though with much genuine suffering—

“When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions!”———

The concussion, however, did him good, and so far brought him to himself, as to enable him to seize, open, and read the letter of Sir George Meddows. There was comfort in it. Not indeed that it could heal the wound he had just received, but at least it diverted in some degree the gloomy current of his thoughts. The notion of movement, of a journey, of the sea, which he had never yet beheld, was welcome as a fresh breeze to a feverish

brow ; and within an hour he was so far recovered as to have made the use of Sir George's letter which the postscript recommended ; and, this being done with perfect success, the various articles were packed up, and his place taken before he slept for the morrow.

By ten o'clock the following morning, he was on the top of a coach that was gaily galloping towards Brighton ; and though he looked pale, melancholy, and careworn, he was not wholly insensible to the pleasure of moving rapidly through the bright clear air of an October morning, with London in the rear, and Brighton in the van.

CHAPTER XXV.

Charles receives many Assurances of Friendship, and contrives to settle some important Business without losing any Time about it.

IF a kind reception from the friends he went to visit could have cured the sorrows he brought with him, Charles Chesterfield would have forgotten all his misfortunes at Brighton. Mrs. Longuéville received him as she had never received him before, for he had been in the room with her for at least ten minutes before it became evident that she had forgotten his presence. Clara was really and truly glad to see him, and testified more interest in her inquiries after his welfare, upon remarking his worried look and clouded eye, than she might have done had he worn the same hopeful and almost triumphant aspect that she had left him with. But all this was nothing in comparison to the warm affection displayed by Sir George. He really could scarcely have appeared more delighted had an only son returned to him after long absence, and he so frequently called the heavens to witness that he was devilish glad to see him, that a temper much less disposed to have faith in professions than that of Charles might have been tempted to believe him.

All this was, of course, very soothing and agreeable, and the more so as it rendered easy the task of confession, which he was well aware he must fully perform before he could profit by their advice. Sir George was so inexpressibly amused by the narrative of his adventure with Mrs. Sherbourne, that it was some time before the vehemence of his mirth left him power to speak, and when it did, his first words were not very encouraging. "The woman is an atrocious animal, Charles, there is no doubt upon that point ; and as to marrying her, it would be a considerably worse speculation than hanging yourself. But, after all, such a business as this is no joke, I promise you. She may easily get half your fortune from you by way of damages, and I am terribly afraid that it will be no easy matter to get out of it. But

stay ! Egad, Charles, I've thought of a way that will do her completely, and neatly, and fealty ! Hurrah ! I have it, I have it !”

Greatly comforted, but exceedingly anxious nevertheless to learn the means by which his kind friend hoped to release him from the threatened danger, he replied —

“ Thank Heaven, Sir George, that you see hope for me ! The half of all I depend upon for subsistence would be bad enough, but I should hold it as nothing in comparison to the disgrace which would ever attach to my name were I to become the defendant in such a cause as this. Tell me, dear Sir George, I entreat you to tell me, how you think I may get out of it ?”

Sir George Meddows very properly replied to the former part of this speech before he answered the latter. “ You are only too right, my dear fellow,” said he ; “ it is certainly no subject for joking, and I feel heartily ashamed of having for a moment been beguiled into laughing at it. To a fine, promising, talented fellow like you, the loss of a few thousands is nothing, positively nothing by way of a misfortune, and I'll lay my life that it would only act as a spur to drive you further and faster on your road to fortune. But the indelible disgrace of having such a story as this tacked to your name for ever must be guarded against at any risk. A man is never ruined, Charles, till he has lost his good name, and that must be preserved to you, *coûte qui coûte*.”

“ But speak, dear sir ! Tell me, I entreat you, in what way you think I may escape from this dreadful danger ?”

“ Be satisfied, Charles, when I tell you that I will take the management of this very awkward business entirely upon myself. Some way or other I must get you through it, my poor fellow ; but the notion that came into my head just now is not altogether unobjectionable. It might possibly involve my own name in a way I should not like, and therefore I had rather think about it, and see if any thing else can be done before I name it to you. But set your mind at ease, my dear boy ; I pledge you my honour that I will not forsake you in this strait, and will get you through it too, somehow or other, whether I involve myself by doing so or not.”

Charles seized the hand of his generous benefactor with the most enthusiastic gratitude, and truly declared that he knew no words strong enough to express the feelings such kindness inspired. Altogether the scene became really touching, for Sir George himself, though rarely manifesting any kind of emotion, except gaiety, seemed moved ; and as he wrung the hand of Charles in return for his fervent pressure, he turned away his head, as if in some degree overcome by it.

This conversation was, in truth, a great relief to the embar-

passed young man; for so heartily did he feel ashamed of the folly which had put him in the power of Mrs. Sherbourne, that he had more than once, since the receipt of her last letter, thought it would be better to marry her than let his name reach his native village through the jocose report of a newspaper, upon such a trial as that with which she threatened him. Alas! how far unlike was this to the fame which he had hoped would precede his return!

His mind lightened of this pressing burden, he proceeded to recount his adventure with Mr. Marchmont, and the hostile termination of their intercourse; and here again Sir George showed himself to be a very cordial friend, by the warm indignation he expressed at what he very justly called the Regenerator's rascally conduct. "But here, Charles," he added, with a very discouraging shake of the head, "I fear I cannot help you. Mr. Marchmont would not care a straw for any thing either you or I could say of him. He is armed both with dagger and shield; and the best advice I can give you is, to let him alone, and take good care to keep out of the way of such dirty doings in future."

To Sir George, notwithstanding all this great kindness, Charles said not a word of what was after all, perhaps, the bitterest of his misfortunes, namely, his terrible disappointment about his poem. He dreaded lest the gay baronet might laugh at this too, and shrunk from the agony he should feel under such an infliction with a degree of cowardice which he had never felt on any occasion before. But of Clara he felt no such fear, and to her he resolved to confess this deepest of all his sorrows. She listened to him as he expected she would do. Her speaking features expressed concern, sympathy, and, what was certainly as welcome as either, surprise.

"There is but one way of consoling yourself, Mr. Chesterfield, for this painful disappointment," she said. "It will reconcile you to your natural home; and when you shall come, after all these misadventures, to compare the feverish hopes of London with the joys of a country life, which never fails to keep every promise of pleasure that it makes us, will you not at last confess that it is the best and safest? For when do spring or autumn cheat us of their promised flowers and fruits?—or the summer hide its glorious face from us?—or even winter fail to bring its crispy brightness, and its cosy comfort?—When you shall come again to compare all this with what you have lost since you looked elsewhere for enjoyment, will you not feel that Charlton is a safer and a happier place than London?"

"Ah, Miss Meddows!" replied Charles, colouring, "I am sure that such were your thoughts about me from the very first."

“Yes, Mr. Chesterfield. I thought your situation at Maplebury appeared to be a singularly happy one, and I own I thought you were running great risk of changing the better for the worser part; were you to take my advice now, it would not be long ere your good mother held you in her arms again. You have been quite long enough from home to enjoy the return to it, and have seen quite enough of London and its ways to furnish materials for many a winter night’s pleasant talk in the country. There is no occasion whatever that you should cease to exercise your talent for writing, which, as you are happily independent, may be indulged blamelessly, and, perhaps, in the end, profitably. Come, Mr. Chesterfield, take my advice. Let your family have the great pleasure of seeing you in the midst of them the day that you come of age. You may do this, and yet have time enough to see all that this part of the country has to show. What say you to it?”

“That there is nothing in the whole world which I should like so well!” exclaimed Charles, in a tone that showed for the moment, at least, a perfect oblivion of all his sorrows. “But—but—there is a great deal of business which I must do before I can leave London for good—and some of it cannot be done till after I am of age,” he added.

Could Mr. Dalrymple have witnessed the change of colour which this avowal produced on the cheek of Clara, it is probable that he would have interpreted it as the proof of a much deeper interest in the young man’s concerns than it was at all seemly for Miss Meddows to feel—and most other people might have been of the same opinion; for who could have guessed the vague, yet defined, the really unknown, yet strangely assured evil, which she prognosticated from young Chesterfield’s coming into possession of his little fortune, while still under the influence of her father? She meditated for a moment, uncertain whether she ought to—whether she could, say more. At length, she replied, “I have certainly no right, Mr. Chesterfield, to question or admonish you; but you have spoken to me so candidly about your literary affairs, that I will venture to take the same tone, and say that I trust you have no concerns of any importance with which your excellent father is unacquainted. Trust me, he is your best and safest counsellor; and I will venture to predict that if you rob him, from any motive whatever, of the confidence which is so justly his due, you will never, while you live, cease to repent it.”

“I hope and trust, my dear Miss Clara,” said Charles, deeply touched, and most truly grateful for the interest which her earnest manner expressed, “that I shall soon again be under the

shelter of my father's roof, and of my father's wisdom. Your kindness has done me great good now, as it always has done from the first hour that I was thrown into your way. You have almost removed the bitterness of my disappointment about my poem, by showing that you did not care the less about me for it, and that makes me hope that they won't despise me for it at home either. Perhaps," he added, with something of solemnity that touched his friend Clara deeply, "Perhaps I have great reason to be thankful for it. I fear that I have been very near falling into a pit of death and darkness, which was made attractive to me by the silly belief that Fame lay at the bottom of it. Had Marchmont been an honest man, he might have ended by leaving me with as little religion as he has got himself."

"If you never lose your religion, Mr. Chesterfield, till an honest man seeks to take it from you, I have a great notion that you have a good chance of keeping it as long as you live," answered Clara. "And now," she added, laughing, "I will release you without preaching any more for the present. You will find delightful rambling upon the downs, and I will bid you good-bye till dinner-time."

Seldom has a poor lad at a distance from all his kith and kin felt himself more in want of their healing love than did our unfortunate Charles when he left London for Brighton; and still seldom has such a one met from persons, so little near to him in any way, such efficient consolation as he had found. Sir George's knowing nods, gay winkings, and confident assurances that he would steer him as clear of that dangerous little quicksand, the Sherbourne, as if he had never driven within sight of her, set him perfectly, though still ignorantly, at ease on that score; while Mrs. Longuéville's increased civility proved that he had lost nothing in the eyes of the finest lady of his acquaintance, by having quarrelled with the celebrated Mr. Marchmont; and Clara's greatly augmented kindness of manner, her air of more familiar intimacy, and the frank sincerity with which she entered into all his concerns, proved beyond the possibility of a doubt that the check which his literary hopes had received had in no degree lessened him in her eyes.

Days—nay, weeks,—flew rapidly. Charles was in nobody's way, for when not enlisted into some scheme of amusement by his friends, he wandered for hours over the beautiful heights which showed him for the first time in his life all the different aspects which the broad sea, for ever varying, yet for ever the same, could wear. But if, instead of this convenient independence of occupation, he had been the most troublesome hanger-on that an unfortunate invitation ever hitched upon a family, it would

have made no difference in the length of his visit; for Sir George Meddows's affection for him was still very evidently on the increase, and he seldom suffered a day to pass without repeating that he was quite determined not to part with Charles till after Christmas.

After some discussion, it had been settled between the brother and sister, that as Brighton was in all ways so exceedingly agreeable, it would be "wisest, discreetest, best," to let their house in Bruton-street. To this arrangement Clara most joyfully acceded, and was made more happy by this new approach to prudence and economy than she believed any thing could now make her.

But before this arrangement could take place, it was necessary that some part of the family should go to town in order to see that the house and all that was in it was left fit for the reception of a tenant. Sir George declared that nothing should induce him to leave the sea for a single day, as the doing so might bring back the complaint which its vicinity had so wonderfully cured; and he declared also, that dear Charles Chesterfield should stay with him, as he could not be left entirely alone.

Happy as Charles had been at Brighton, he certainly would greatly have preferred leaving it for London at this time. A few days only remained of his minority, and his punctual father had already transmitted to him all instructions as to how he might immediately avail himself of its termination, for the purpose of paying Sir George, as well as some other debts, all trifling however, but which he could not have discharged before he left town without stripping himself of his last shilling. He was eager, therefore, to show his vouchers at the bank, and relieve himself from the responsibilities which appeared to him almost disgraceful. But he felt far too grateful for all the kindness he had received not to yield to Sir George's wish, and, merely saying that his principal business in London would be to obtain the money necessary for liquidating the debt he owed him, he agreed to postpone it till the ladies should return. Any attempt on the part of Clara to interfere with this arrangement was impossible; and the two ladies set off for London attended only by servants.

Sir George was still an excellent walker, and as it happened that the day on which Mrs. Longuéville and her niece started on this expedition was a remarkably fine one, he proposed to his young companion, as soon as their carriage had driven off, that they should take a long ramble upon the downs. Charles readily agreed, and they set off arm in arm, in a very friendly and familiar manner.

As soon as they had fairly quitted the town and its suburbs, Sir George, gaily addressing his companion, said, "My dear Charles, you have never yet heard what my scheme is for freeing

you from the clutches of Mrs. Sherbourne. Have you no curiosity about it?—no longing desire to know what I mean to do?”

“Not much, Sir George,” replied the young man; “I am so ignorant myself, and so full of faith in you, that I have permitted my mind to turn away as much as possible from all thoughts on the subject. But I shall be very glad to listen to you if you have any information to communicate on the subject. Do you not think, however, from my having heard nothing more of her, that she may have changed her mind upon the subject?”

“And come to the magnanimous resolution of letting you rest in peace?” said Sir George. “No, upon my word, Charles, I do not think any such thing. The weeks that have passed since her sublime resolution was taken have not been more, nor so much, I should think, as would be necessary to put the business *en train*—not to mention, moreover, that it is exceedingly probable they don’t know where to find you. How should they—you did not leave your address with her, I suppose?”

“Most certainly I did not.”

“Then lay not the flattering unction to your soul that you will hear no more of her. Trust me, the next *billet-doux* you will receive will be through the hands of her lawyer.”

Charles answered only with a deep sigh, which seemed to acknowledge the truth of the prediction, and all the horror of it.

“Nay, sigh not so,” said Sir George, laughing; “faint heart, they say, never won fair lady, nor got rid of one either, Charles; you must remember that, if you please. And now let me speak to you very seriously of a matter of business, not so wholly unconnected with this of Mrs. Sherbourne as you may think at first sight. It is one, too, my dear Charles, which I do assure you without the slightest mixture of flattery, or making a boast of the real affection which I feel for you, has very frequently employed my thoughts since you left your good father’s house with me. I speak of the employment, or investment as it is technically called, of your little fortune, Charles. I know no man living who better understands the management of the particular class of affairs in which he is engaged than your excellent father; but his manner of life has put all questions concerning the profitable investment of money quite out of his reach, and it is for that reason that I feel myself called upon, imperatively, I may say, to step forward with my knowledge and experience upon a subject which certainly, beyond all others, requires both. Are you disposed to listen to me, my dear young friend, and for the present to turn your thoughts altogether from Mrs. Sherbourne?”

Charles assured him that he should listen with grateful attention to every thing he said on the subject.

"Well then," was the kind reply, "I will speak to you as I would to my own son, if I were blessed with one. Are you aware, Charles, how very low the rate of government interest has fallen?"

"I think my father told me, Sir George, but, upon my word, I forget all about it," replied the young man, ingenuously.

"So it ever is with men of genius, I believe. Speculators upon Providence do not pay half the attention that they ought to do to the admirable equality that exists between man and man. You write verses with the facility of Pope, and at the very moment of coming into possession of the money, upon the interest of which you are to exist, you actually do not know what that interest is; whilst I, who could hardly write a stanza if my life depended upon it, understand with the nicest accuracy the varying value of every species of property, with its real worth and annual returns, as thoroughly as a shepherd knows his flock, or a gardener his seedlings. Nor is the case peculiar to us, Charles. You will find, as you get on, the same chequered pattern of intellect over the whole world. It is therefore that men find it necessary to help each other—and, by doing this, the talents of each turn to the advantage of all."

Charles was delighted. He had never heard Sir George descant in so philosophical a strain before; and he felt all the advantage of having for a friend and guide a man whose general views were as enlarged as his practical and special knowledge was acute. "He will get me out of this Sherbourne noose," thought he, "if mortal man can do it."

"Your income, my dear fellow," resumed the baronet, "if your property remains in the funds, will be somewhat less than a hundred and fifty pounds a-year. On this sum, I will venture to say, from what I already know of your gentlemanly habits and feelings, you will find it quite impossible to live. You know what you have already spent since you came to town, Charles, and you know, too, that you have not altogether lived at your own expense. Guess, therefore, how things would go with you, if you attempted to live independently upon a hundred and fifty pounds a-year."

"It would be impossible, Sir George," replied the young man, while a pang shot through his heart as he remembered with what confidence he had made his calculations for the future, under the persuasion that the principal part of his income would proceed from his literary labours. But, after the pause of a moment, he added, with tolerable composure, "I am in no danger, however, of falling into difficulties on that account. I shall hope in a year or two to get into orders, and in the interval my father will be both able and willing to help me."

This was not exactly such an answer as Sir George would have desired; but, nevertheless, it rather stimulated than checked his eloquence, and he therefore proceeded with great animation.

“How I love you, Charles,” he exclaimed, “for that gentle and beautiful spirit of contentment, which prepares you, as it were, for every possible contingency. But this rather increases than lessens the desire I feel to see you absolutely and *bonâ-fide* independent. Independent of the world and all its caprices, independent of Mr. Marchmont, independent even of your own excellent father. And most truly do I rejoice to say that it is in my power to put you in the way of becoming so. I have, as you probably know, very large estates in Ireland.”

Sir George paused; but Charles never happened to have heard any thing about his large estates in Ireland, and he therefore replied by a gentle shake of the head, which very distinctly said “No;” but which implied no shadow of doubt as to the fact.

“Yes,” resumed Sir George, “the estate is in truth only too large, and, notwithstanding its noble rent-roll, is perpetually encumbered by enormous expenses in the way of—of—repairing farm-houses, draining bogs, building bridges, making roads, and a hundred other things too tedious to mention, all more or less inevitable upon widely-spreading property of this kind. Now, of course, this enables—I may say, indeed, that it obliges me, to raise trifling sums of money from time to time upon this fine property. Your excellent father, as you perhaps know, Charles, has already had the advantage of vesting a thousand pounds in this very advantageous manner. I had great pleasure in offering it to him, but not so much, I freely confess, as I feel now in proposing the same thing to you; for somehow or other you have contrived to take a singularly strong hold upon my affections. Your four thousand pounds, Charles, secured by a mortgage upon my estate, will bring you in exactly three times the income yielded by the funds; and though this, my dear boy, is by no means equal to the fortune I shall hope eventually to see you enjoy, it would at any rate be a maintenance. What say you to this, dear Charles? Are you willing to trust me with your money upon my personal security?”

These last words were uttered with a pleasant smile, which smile Charles affectionately returned, as he said——

“Trust you, Sir George?”

The extremity of the rustic ignorance in which poor Charles Chesterfield had been reared will be properly estimated, when it is stated, that the ill-matched ideas of dishonesty and high station had never at any instant of his existence entered his head together. The noonday sun and total darkness would hardly

have seemed more incongruous, had he heard them named together; and Sir George's little obliviousness about shillings and sixpences was so far from having even awakened suspicion within him, that it had only made him feel more respectfully aware of the great difference in their situations, inasmuch as what to him was quite inconvenient to lose, was too trifling for his wealthy patron even to remember.

This merry question therefore, "Are you willing to trust me with your money?" very naturally produced a smiling rejoinder, because, of course, he could only take it jocosely; but when, after patting him good-humouredly on the shoulder, and nodding his head, as much as to say, "We understand each other,"—when, after this little eloquent dumb show, Sir George resumed the conversation in a graver and more business-like tone, Charles answered with equal gravity, and assured Sir George that he himself and all his family would be most deeply grateful if he would have the great kindness to undertake the management of his money, and the placing it in whatever way he thought most advantageous.

"I believe it, my dear boy," replied the baronet, wringing his hand with much affection. "And, this business once settled, I will explain my plan about Mrs. Sherbourne."

No one could be more lively or agreeable than was Sir George after the conversation had reached this point; but he soon confessed that he felt himself some few years older than he had been, and therefore proposed that they should turn their steps homewards, which brought them back in time for Sir George to despatch a letter or two by the post; one of which was to desire his man of business immediately to send down a power of attorney for Charles to execute, which, as he observed to Chesterfield, would enable them to complete the business without having the bore and the expense of a journey to London, just when Brighton was so particularly agreeable.

This sort of business indeed, when proper agents are set to manage it, is easily and promptly executed; and several days before Mrs. Longuéville and Clara returned from London, Sir George Meddows was in possession of Charles Chesterfield's legacy, and Charles Chesterfield was in possession of Sir George Meddow's note of hand for the amount.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Schemes—The Plotters disagree—Much Business is afoot—A sudden Journey—A *Tête-à-tête* between the Father and Daughter.

As soon as this little affair was completely settled, Charles once more led the after-dinner conversation between himself and his

patron to the subject of his threatened difficulties with Mrs. Sherbourne.

"All our money business is settled now, Sir George," said he, "is it not?"

"Yes, Charles, quite settled; every thing is now perfectly straight between us."

"Well then, my dear sir, will you forgive my plaguing you once more about Mrs. Sherbourne? You said that you had thought of some plan to get me out of her power."

"And so I have, Charles; do not fancy that I have forgotten it; but no man who thoroughly understands business, none at least with such regular habits as myself, ever will mix two things together, if it be in any way possible to keep them separate. It is for this reason, and for this reason only, that I have suffered this subject to drop. You refer to it, my dear fellow, exactly at the proper time, not only because one thing being finished another may be taken in hand; but because the completion of the one enables you very advantageously to set about the other. But tell me, Charles, do you think you can stand the shock of being told that in my opinion Mrs. Sherbourne's tender attachment to you originated in her knowledge of the fact that you had a sum of ready money in your possession?"

"My vanity *has* made a great fool of me, Sir George, as I am quite ready to confess; but as far as Mrs. Sherbourne is concerned that weakness is quite over, and did I think it at all possible that she could have known of this before I myself named it to her, I should be quite ready to believe that from the very first her attention to me had no other object."

"Have no further doubts then on the subject. I will undertake to assure you that she did know it,—and further, Charles, I will undertake to assure you also, that this threatened action is only brought forward because she knows you have those few thousands wherewith to pay the hoped-for damages. This being the case, you have only to let her understand that you have made away with your money, in order to make her instantly suspend the proceedings."

"But if I tell her that I have let you have the money, Sir George, she will know that it is only ten times safer than ever it was. That will not stop her," said Charles innocently.

Sir George for a moment employed himself very intently in peeling a dry walnut, but presently answered, "That is perfectly true, certainly, and therefore care must be taken that the transaction between us is placed in such a light as to make her feel that you have no longer the command of the money. To say the truth, I believe it was this notion which first led me to think of

your placing it in my hands, and I particularly wish you should let your excellent father understand that such was my motive."

"My father, Sir George?" replied Charles with a look of dismay; "I would not for the whole world that my father or any of my friends at Charlton should ever know any thing about Mrs. Sherbourne, or the foolish scrape I have got into with her. Indeed, Sir George, you must excuse my saying any thing to my father about it."

Sir George's countenance had less of good-humour in it at that moment than young Chesterfield had ever seen it wear before. "I should be sorry to vex you, Charles, in any way," he replied, "but I'll tell you fairly that I shall consider myself as exceedingly ill-used if your father is not made to understand the reason for which I have so hurried through this business. With me, every thing, it is true, is done promptly—such is my habit, as it is in fact of all real men of business; but in this case I should certainly not have permitted you to place this money in my hands without consulting your dear good father on the subject, had it not been for the sake of having it at once in our power to stop this nefarious claim upon you. He must know it, Charles, he must indeed; unless, by the by, you should prefer not mentioning the transaction to him at all; in that case, of course, I shall have nothing more to say."

"I should prefer any thing, Sir George," replied Charles, turning pale at the idea of Bessy's hearing of this hateful promise of marriage; "I should prefer any thing to my father's knowing—to any of them down at Maplebury knowing of this woman's pretended claim upon me."

"Then will you give me your word of honour, my dear Charles, that you will not say a word to your father, or to any member of your family, of your having sold your money out of the funds?" demanded Sir George eagerly.

Charles looked puzzled and embarrassed. The idea of having such a secret as this to keep from his family was extremely painful to him, and he ventured to say, "Indeed, Sir George, my father will feel very grateful to you; as I told you when you first mentioned taking my money upon such good interest, and he could not be more so, I am sure, because of your having a second motive, besides your kindness, for doing it."

"You must give me leave to be a judge of that, Mr. Chesterfield," replied the baronet gravely. "I know your father well; he is an excellent man, but he has notions of his own; and I am quite sure that he would not like it well that you and I should have settled this business without consulting him. In fact, nothing but this entanglement with Mrs. Sherbourne could have

led me to do it. When he hears of that, he will understand my motives, and appreciate them properly, but not before."

"But, Sir George," persisted poor Charles, "how much more cause he will have to be angry if the transaction be kept secret from him altogether, than if it has only been arranged without consulting him. So very advantageous as it is to me, he cannot be seriously angry at that, especially, Sir George, as he knows, I dare say, your prompt way of doing business that you speak of."

"Very well, Mr. Charles Chesterfield. Of course you are perfectly the master of yourself and of your actions. You may communicate, or you may conceal, precisely which you choose—far be it from me to attempt to assume any control, or even influence over you. But in the same manner that I leave you free, I expect that you will leave me so; and I tell you with the honest frankness which you ought by this time to know is the most remarkable feature in my character, that whenever you inform your father, or any of your relatives, that you have sold your money out of the funds, and placed it in my hands, I shall forthwith inform them what the motive was which induced me to permit your doing so, without writing to consult them on the subject. I mean to say—understand me clearly—I never permit the slightest equivocation or uncertainty to rest on any words of mine—I mean to say that, whenever you inform them of this transfer of your money to me, I shall inform them of your promise of marriage to Mrs. Sherbourne."

"Then both the one and the other shall remain secret, Sir George," replied the embarrassed young man, whose objections to his misadventure being known at Maplebury grew stronger the more he thought of it. "I do give you the promise you require, and hereby pledge you my word and honour never to mention the subject to my father or any of my family as long as you will keep the other secret too."

"Very well, my dear fellow, that is as it should be," said Sir George, cordially holding out his hand to him. "It would be a thousand pities if you and I should ever have any lasting dispute, our real feelings and principles are so completely in unison."

Exceedingly touched, and exceedingly flattered, Charles pressed respectfully the offered hand, and said, with a smile that marked his entire satisfaction, "Now then, my dear Sir George, have the kindness to tell me what it is I ought to say to Mrs. Sherbourne about my money?"

To conceal nothing from the courteous reader, it must be confessed that this question found Sir George Meddows totally unprepared with an answer. His first object had been to get possession of Charles Chesterfield's legacy; his second,

to conceal the whole transaction from the friendly but shrewd old farmer, and further than that "his habits of business" had not yet carried him. But he was not a man to be easily disconcerted by a question, and raising his hand to his chin with a look of much meditative wisdom, he said, after the interval of two or three minutes, "The object we have in view, Charles, is distinct and clear enough; that we must of course take care not to lose sight of. But as to the manner of it, there may be room for doubt. In the course of to-morrow, however, I will make a sort of sketch of the letter which I think you ought to write to her."

Charles was all gratitude. That evening he accompanied his distinguished friend to the theatre, and feeling convinced that his affairs were speedily drawing to the crisis which would immediately enable him to return to Maplebury, now become to his imagination the only haven of rest in which he desired to find himself, he once more felt himself a fortunate and happy man; and though smiling at the folly which had once led him to fancy that he should find happiness any where else, he yet rejoiced to think how much he should have to talk about, how much to describe when he next found himself seated beside little Bessy in the orchard. Sometimes, it is true, he recalled the style of his last letter to her, and his very ears tingled as he remembered how many times he had called her "little girl;" but he got over this by mentally exclaiming, "And so she is! she is a little girl, and a most angelic little girl. And when she finds I think her so still, she will forgive my letters for being rather more stupid than my sonnets."

At a rather late breakfast on the following morning, Sir George presented to him the draught of a letter to Mrs. Sherbourne. "You see what habits of business are, Charles," said he. "I suppose you have been sleeping snugly, while I have been at work for you. Read this over, and tell me if you do not think it will answer our purpose."

Charles took the paper with a little trepidation, and read as follows:—

"MADAM,—The nature of your attachment to me from the very beginning has become so evident, that I scruple not to treat your present course of proceeding with the unceremonious frankness which must be most convenient to both of us. The action which you threaten to bring has doubtless for its object the obtaining a portion of the legacy which you have heard spoken of, as damages. I therefore think it right to inform you, that this legacy has passed from my hands into those of a gentleman

to whom I have paid it as a debt of honour, so that I am now the same penniless individual that I was before this little fortune came to me. If, however, your attachment is not of the mercenary kind which I have been led to suppose, and that from motives of real affection you are still willing to be my wife, destitute as I am, this proof of your sincerity will at once remove all my doubts, and find me perfectly willing to renew the engagement."

Sir George Meddows sat watching Charles with a sort of triumphant chuckle as he perused these lines, and felt both indignation and disappointment upon perceiving that instead of the satisfaction which they were expected to produce, the countenance of young Chesterfield expressed nothing but dismay. Having reached its conclusion, the astounded young man folded up the paper, and laying it as far from himself and as near to Sir George as he conveniently could, said with an air of simple and profound astonishment, "but there is no truth in it, Sir George."

The baronet laughed. The laugh was about half genuine, and half affected. "Ah! I see now," said his comforted companion, "you are only making fun of Mrs. Sherbourne, and of me too, perhaps. But, dear Sir George, do tell me, in serious earnest, what you think I had better say to her? Of course you do not mean I should send this."

Sir George Meddows took counsel with himself for a moment as to the importance of the rustic lad's opinion of him at this advanced period of their acquaintance, and speedily came to the conclusion that at present it mattered not a pin whether he thought him an angel or a demon, a saint or a sinner. Nevertheless, though he condescended not to change his mode of proceeding, he was willing to give it as fair an appearance as might be, and answered lightly, that he had no jest in his thoughts, but added, "You probably do not very clearly understand the nature of the business you are upon, Mr. Chesterfield. When you know the world a little better, you will become aware of the necessity, imperative upon all men, of using for defence pretty nearly the same weapons as those with which they are attacked. Were your *inamorata* a lady of high principle and unblemished integrity, every word addressed to her should be marked by these attributes; but as the case stands, you are lost, if in your skirmishing you use not foils of the self-same length as her own."

Charles mused for a moment or two, as if endeavouring fully to understand the meaning of what had been said to him, and then replied—"I am sure you know best about every thing, excepting just what nobody can tell exactly except myself. How *can* I tell her that I am ready to marry her, when I know in my

own heart that I would rather lose every farthing I have got in the world, than do any such thing."

"Then tell her this, Mr. Chesterfield, if you think your doing so will stop the action. But I doubt if you would find it succeed."

"No, no, Sir George, I don't want to tell her any thing about it; and I do not see there is any need that I should. What I hoped you would be kind enough to explain to me was, the nature of my loan to you, which, if I understood you rightly, would render a verdict for damages of no use to her."

"Most assuredly the loan you have made is of that nature," replied the baronet, with a peculiar smile, that was not unusual with him. "And as to the phrase, '*debt of honour*,' you may safely use it, without at all wounding your conscience—for you did once owe me a hundred pounds you know, which was decidedly a debt of honour, inasmuch as I had taken no security for it—and the paying this was a part of the transaction. Take my word for it, my good fellow, the best thing you can do will be to copy this letter, and send it off, without making any more fuss about it; and as he spoke, Sir George pushed the paper back towards his companion.

Harassed and puzzled, poor Charles once more opened the paper and read it; but though much more aware than he had at first been of the excellent effect which it was calculated to produce upon the lady, he was, if possible, more conscious also of its falsehood; and the bold words, "I never told a lie in my life, Sir George," were on his lips, but as he raised his head to utter them, he perceived such an expression of haughty contempt on the countenance of the baronet, that he checked himself, and suddenly feeling that he was bound to him by no tie which exacted either obedience or confidence beyond what was convenient to himself, he pocketed the paper with an air of such quiet composure as somewhat to puzzle his sharp-witted patron, and said—"I am sure it is exceedingly kind of you, Sir George, to take so much trouble about it; but the sun is shining so gloriously upon the sea, and the pier looks so very delightful, that I must go and enjoy it a little before I think any more about this tiresome business—I shall have plenty of time to write afterwards."

A newspaper, together with several letters, were handed to Sir George at this moment, which stopped whatever reply he might have been going to make; and, hastily finishing his breakfast, Charles made a silent unseen bow and departed, leaving the baronet deeply engaged with his despatches, and betaking himself according to his proclaimed intention to the enjoyment of a bright wintry sun; but the morning did not pass without his having composed the following amended version of Sir George's epistle:

“MADAM—The nature of your attachment to me has become so evident, that I scruple not to treat your present course of proceeding with the frankness which must be most convenient to both of us. The action which you threaten to bring against me has doubtless for its object the obtaining a portion of the legacy which you have heard spoken of, as damages. I therefore think it right to inform you that this legacy has passed from my hands in a manner which prevents its being available to any such object.

“I remain, Madam, your obedient servant,

“CHARLES CHESTERFIELD.”

This amended epistle was put into the post before he met his patron at dinner, and he had reason to rejoice at having been so prompt, as he would have found small leisure for writing afterwards. Sir George rang the bell sharply the moment he appeared; “Let us have dinner the instant it is ready,” he said to the servant who answered it; then turning to Charles he continued, “You must not think of dressing, my good fellow; I must be off for town to-night—and I think you had better accompany me. I have for some time been only waiting the result of a consultation of physicians well acquainted with my case, in order to decide upon taking a short tour on the continent; I have received their approval of this scheme by this morning’s post, as I should have told you directly, had you not bolted in such a hurry. But with this I received other letters also, mentioning circumstances which render it necessary for me to settle two or three trifling affairs before I leave England. You know my regular habits of business, Charles, and will not wonder at my being in a hurry to finish whatever there is to be done. Of course, my dear fellow, you will now return home immediately, and I have great pleasure in thinking what a much smarter fellow I send back than I brought out with me—and a wiser one too, I have no doubt of it. Here comes a summons to dinner—that’s well, for we have not a moment to lose. The coach starts at ten, and you must get your things together as soon as you have dined. My man has been at the same work for me all the morning.”

This hurried movement considerably startled young Chesterfield; but, obedience being inevitable, he gave himself very little trouble concerning the motives which led to the command he had received, and leaping the not very agreeable interval that must occur before he started again from London on his journey homeward, he fixed his thoughts almost wholly on that dear home itself, and on all the cherished objects it contained; every one of which had resumed its proper niche in his heart, from the moment the film engendered by his wild literary hopes fell from his eyes.

The night journey, therefore, though his companion was either sleepy, sad, or sulky (for he never uttered a word), was far from disagreeable, as, between waking and sleeping dreams, he passed the whole time that it lasted in the most agreeable manner that a night journey could permit.

On arriving in town, the stage was exchanged for a hack, that speedily rattled them to Bruton-street, where the bills upon the windows, announcing that it was still to let, accounted for the continued residence there of Mrs. Longuéville and Clara, which had been prolonged some days beyond the period at first proposed.

The greatly-reduced household were all fast asleep, and the difficulty of obtaining an entrance seemed to complete the discomfort of the lively baronet's temper, for he swore vehemently before the lagging doors of his once gay mansion opened to receive him, and as he entered them he uttered something so like a groan that Chesterfield started.

It is not an uncommon thing for persons entering even their own mansions unexpectedly, and at an hour which custom dedicates to repose, to give especial directions that no one shall be disturbed before their usual time of rising; but Sir George Meddows was not one of these. He ordered the *Dustabell* who let them in first to awaken Miss Meddows without a moment's delay, and desire her to come immediately to make his breakfast, and then to return again, without a moment's delay, to light a fire in the library, which being done, Sir George sat himself down beside it in a state of mind by no means enviable.

There exists in all *very* highly civilised parts of the world a race of male human beings, who, after having forfeited successively, and sometimes in very rapid succession, every openly recognised claim to respect from their fellow creatures, contrive to avoid the penalty consequent on the loss of it, by boldly enacting a code of their own, in which the relative positions of virtue and vice, according to the classification of the vulgar, is so far reversed as to render a practical defiance of the old-fashioned decalogue no impediment whatever to the very highest consideration and esteem. This species of conventional toleration would be much less remarkable were it wholly confined to those benefited by it; but, till one becomes used to it, the effect of seeing this sort of gentry received with distinguished consideration in all fashionable circles, and treated as something too precious to be examined freely, is somewhat startling to the moral sense. Such is the case, however; and few persons owed more to this species of voluntary blindness in those with whom they associated than Sir George Meddows. In so slight a sketch of this accomplished gentleman as the progress of Charles Chesterfield's adventures has rendered

necessary, any detailed rehearsal of his various claims to distinction as a man of fashion would be out of place; but enough has been said to make it conceivable that, notwithstanding his peculiarly regular habits of business, he might find himself occasionally in difficulties which threatened to dash him, by a most Satan-like descent, from the heaven of elegant indifference to the grimey depths of a spunging-house. Though not quite so witty a man as the immortal spendthrift, who not unfrequently paid the claims which called for gold by a sparkling currency of his own, as bright and almost as precious as diamonds, Sir George Meddows had great mental resources. He was plausible, yet keen; seemingly frank, while, beyond sounding, false; and so boldly unscrupulous as to all ways and means which did not threaten to involve discovery as to render him a very perfect master of elegant dishonesty. Yet, notwithstanding all the chartered privileges of an insolvent of *bon ton*, there are some few ticklish points in their code, which, having reference only to their own mutual convenience, and being perfectly independent of any vulgar consideration for the insignificant class who furnish the clique with the necessaries of life, are adhered to and obeyed with almost superstitious reverence. Rather than infringe such and live, many a very life-loving individual has sent a brace of bullets through his brains; and rather than infringe such and die, many more of the same class have violated other claims ten thousand times more sacred, and reduced wife and children to want bread, rather than be pointed at as a defaulter in the only pecuniary engagement in which honesty has nothing to do.

It was under the *peine forte et dure* of a pressing claim of this kind, that Sir George Meddows had made his present visit to town. The same post which had brought him that sort of gentle hint from an *honourable* dun, from which neither wit nor wile can procure an escape, brought also a letter from Arthur Dalrymple, stating his intention of waiting upon him at Brighton, for the purpose of settling the business they had to transact, previous to his setting off for St. Petersburg, if it would be more convenient for Sir George to see him there than in town. Unfortunately for the gay baronet, this latter claim, though a just one, was, from circumstances which had given it considerable notoriety, almost as imperative as the former one. From the time, however, that Sir George had got rid of the importunate Mr. Cromwell, by the aid of a loan from Dalrymple, he had felt no other anxiety respecting this, as well as the other claims which his ward had against him, than what arose from the unlucky month or two by which the majority of Arthur Dalrymple preceded that of Charles Chesterfield. Concerning his power of

obtaining possession of poor Charles's little fortune, he had never entertained the slightest doubt; and the satisfaction which he felt when the transaction was completed arose chiefly from knowing that he might now be released from the bore of the foolish lad's presence. But unfortunately the four thousand pounds thus obtained, though somewhat more than was due to Dalrymple, was by no means sufficient to satisfy both that and the still more pressing claim of his purely *honourable* creditor; and he now sat beside the comfortless-looking impromptu breakfast which his yawning valet spread before him, in deep rumination of the ways and means by which he might get clear of both.

So thoroughly had he already availed himself of every possible mode of raising money, that one only resource was now left him, and it certainly was not without something a little like an honest pang at his heart that he at length resolutely determined to avail himself of it—for this last resource was the fortune of Clara. Besides this passing pang at the idea of robbing her of her last shilling, he had moreover a great aversion to making the request, for he knew it could only be done effectually by making her comprehend the necessity for it. She could neither be mystified, like Charles, into a belief that the transaction was a profitable one, nor be persuaded to consider it her duty to administer to the extravagance which it was the constant object of her life to check.

Nevertheless, he was as sure of success with her, as he had before been with Charles; for he was certain that he had only to state his inability to settle with Mr. Dalrymple without her assistance in order to obtain it. "And after all," thought he, "I have no doubt, or at least very little, that he will end by making her his wife, and then this trifle will not signify a straw. There can be no question about their liking each other, and there would be fifty times more chance of my spoiling the match by showing myself up as a ruined man, than by privately making Clara understand how greatly I want her assistance."

This train of reasoning proved so thoroughly successful, that by the time his daughter had completed her hasty toilet, and stood before him, he felt perfectly ready to eat his breakfast, and set about the parental robbery at the same time.

"How do, Clara, dear? Mercy on me, child! London, in the dead season, does not seem to agree better with you than it does with me. It is a horrid climate, except just when the air is fanned and revived, as it were, by the rapid evolutions of aristocratic equipages. In sober earnest, you look exceedingly pale, and if I had not decided upon a continental trip before, I should certainly do so now, and that solely for your sake, my love."

Clara assured him that she was perfectly well, and then made some inquiries upon this new travelling plan, of which she had as yet heard nothing, and which, in truth, inspired her with no very pleasant anticipations.

“To tell you the truth, Clara,” said her father in reply, “I rejoice that your aunt’s lie-a-bed propensities will leave us *tête-à-tête* for a little while this morning, as I have some very important business on which to consult you. I have sent young Chesterfield off on an errand to the city on purpose, and told him to breakfast at a coffee-house, as I was going to be busy; so that I may now have the comfort of opening my heart to you, my dear girl, without interruption; and with such a daughter, this is the greatest comfort a harassed father can have.”

Must it be accounted as one of the good or the evil features of Clara’s fortune, that nothing which her father did or said could deceive her? Neither his lively sallies, nor his impromptu jokes, his cajoling fondness, nor his careless *insouciance*, could ever persuade her that he was not labouring in his incessant vocation of seeming what he was not. Any uninitiated spectator, who had witnessed the cold reception which she now gave to his offered confidence, would have classed her as a young woman of hard unfeeling temper, and him, good man, as one of the most unfortunate fathers in the world. Nor would such a spectator have been altogether wrong as to the latter clause, for Clara was as far as possible from being such a daughter as Sir George Meddows would have wished for. It was, unquestionably, exceedingly annoying to read pain, doubt, and distrust, in the anxious look which fixed itself on his, as he spoke. “Confound the girl’s eyes!” he murmured inwardly; “what a cursed way she has of looking in one’s face.”

The business a-foot, however, was not of a nature to be remitted upon any discouragement which the pale Clara’s eyes could give; and, getting rid of their discomfiting influence by fixing his own on his plate, he resumed:

“I am devilish sorry to tell you, my dear Clara, that I find we have been living too fast. Not but what my habits of business would have protected me, of course, from all inconvenience of this kind, had it not been that, in an evil hour, my good-nature and kindness of heart beguiled me into becoming security for a friend. I give you my honour, Clara, that when I did this, I believed the fellow to be as honourable a man as myself; or otherwise, for your sake, my dear child, I should have been more cautious. Never again, Clara, will I be guilty of such imprudence. You who know my habits of business must be as much astonished at it as I am myself. But we are none of us

wise at all times ! Be this as it may, however, it is useless, and worse than useless, to waste time and thought on what is done. The poet is right, my dear child, when he says—

‘Not Jove himself has power upon the past.’

So no more of what I have done ; let us rather concentrate all our wisdom as to the best manner of repairing it.”

Here Sir George paused, and looked with an air of smiling fondness into his daughter’s face, as if to give and receive consolation. But Clara said not a word, and now in her turn seemed anxious to avoid all communing with eyes, for she too fixed her glances upon her plate.

“You are aware, my love,” resumed Sir George, now sighing deeply, “you are aware that Dalrymple is of age, and is now in town, expressly for the purpose of settling accounts with me. You are aware of this, are you not, dear Clara ?”

Dear Clara replied as steadily as she could, that she knew Mr. Dalrymple was of age, but not that he was in town.

“Yes, he is here—and unless something can be done amongst us to prevent it, I must submit to the eternal disgrace of telling him that I am four thousand pounds in his debt, but that I have no means of paying him.”

Clara changed colour ; she first blushed violently, and then became paler than before. But still she spoke not.

“What can be done ? For God’s sake, Clara, give me your advice. What can be done to save us all from this withering disgrace ?” said her father, suddenly slapping his forehead with his hand, and looking rather desperate.

This species of melo-dramatic performance did Clara good ; she saw how completely he was acting, and had she not known that he had received rents for Dalrymple, she might have even hoped that the whole history of his debt was a fable ; nor was her sympathy at all increased when he rose from his chair, and seizing her hand, said in the most approved style of tragic intensity, “Clara ! my honour is in your keeping. Will you save me ? Will you lend me, only for a few short weeks perhaps, the four thousand pounds required to pay this dreadful debt ?”

If the being prepared for this demand could have enabled her to receive it with composure, she would not have trembled so violently, for she had guessed most accurately what was coming, from the moment he had mentioned his wish for confidential conversation with her. To do Mrs. Longuéville justice, it must be stated, that while keeping a most strict guard over every shilling of her own property, she had not failed to point out to her neice the absolute necessity of preserving the little independence she possessed ; openly avowing her fears that Sir George was involved,

and very eloquently insisting upon the obvious fact, that if these fears were just, the kindest and most dutiful thing his daughter could do would be to retain the power of giving him, at least, the necessaries of life, should his imprudence ever place him in want of them. This sort of conversation, frequently repeated, had naturally in some degree prepared Clara for the present scene; and when it began, she moved herself with all the resolution of which she was mistress, in order to prevent the weakness which might tempt her to give up what she was quite convinced it was her duty to keep. But the introduction of Dalrymple's name into the business had totally upset all her reasonings, and shaken all her resolutions. A thousand feelings, which she would have found it impossible to explain, made her conscious that no foregone conclusions on the subject could settle the question of yielding or not yielding; as it now stood, and the very utmost efforts of her self-command could only enable her to say—"I must beg time to think, papa, before I answer you. You must, sir, allow me a little time before I can decide."

Sir George's habits of business led him to wince a little at this delay, which he not only feared might be dangerous, but knew to be inconvenient; yet after a slight word or two, indicative of his wish that the matter might be settled at once, he yielded to it with the best grace he could; for there was that in Clara's look and manner which convinced him he had judged rightly in believing that the shame of this debt to Dalrymple was more than she could bear.

"Well then, be it so, my dearest child!" said he, in a tone of melancholy submissiveness. "I have done my duty. I have placed my own honour, and the honour of your name and race, in your hands, and I will await your fiat with patience, however agonizing the uncertainty may be."

"The uncertainty shall not last long, father," she replied. "To-day is Wednesday—on Friday I will tell you how I have decided to act"—and so they parted; Sir George leaving the house at as early an hour as he deemed it respectable to be seen in the streets, and poor Clara retreating to her little sitting-room, to ruminate and chew the cud of fancies that had considerably less of sweet than bitter in them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Important Interview between the Hero and Miss Meddows, which leads the young Lady to conduct herself in a very independent Style.

THE weeks which they had passed together at Brighton had greatly increased the friendly intimacy between Miss Meddows

and Charles Chesterfield. Rejoiced for his sake that his visions of metropolitan renown had vanished and left him in possession of his sober senses, she had taken a benevolent pleasure in leading him to converse of his home, of his family—of Mr. Westbrook, and even of little Bessy; and in observing how rapidly the idea of being restored to them was effacing from his mind all the mortifying sensations produced by his failure. It was, therefore, without any feeling of displeasure or surprise, that in about four hours after she had quitted the breakfast-table, which had been the scene of the foregoing conversation, he appeared at the door of her retreat.

“Come in, Mr. Chesterfield,” she said, kindly, though not greatly delighted at being obliged to talk of indifferent things when her heart and head were so deeply occupied by her own sad position. But Clara had laboured to watch over the interests and welfare of Charles from the moment that she found the strange project of bringing him to London was inevitable. She knew that she had saved him from many mortifications, and on more than one occasion had guarded his little purse from the laughing, lively, depredations of his patron. All this made her feel an interest in him; for nothing is more true than that kindness is engendered quite as much by the performance of kind offices as by the receiving them.

“Do I interrupt you, Miss Meddows?” said the young man, remaining on the threshold with the handle of the lock in his hand; “tell me to go if I do.”

“No, no, I shall not tell you to go, indeed. It is a great while since I saw you last, Mr. Chesterfield, and I really want to talk to you a little about your future plans. Are you aware that my father talks of going abroad?”

“Yes, Miss Meddows, he told me so himself; but it was only an hour or two before we set off in the coach for London, and we did not talk at all as we came along, so that I know very little about it. Are you going too, Miss Meddows, and Mrs. Longuéville?”

“But about yourself, Mr. Chesterfield: let us think of that first. What are your own plans? I hope you mean to return home immediately. Depend upon it this will be your best course.”

“Indeed I do, Miss Meddows,” he replied, “and I cannot thank you enough for this good advice, as well as for all your other kindness to me since I have been here. That is the only part of the business that I shall ever look back to with pleasure. Not but what Sir George has been very kind and obliging too; but a gentleman who is so much a man of business as Sir George, cannot be expected to have time, you know, to talk with me in the

same kind way that you have done. Let me live as long as I may, I never shall forget your goodness."

"I am very glad, dear Charles, if I have been a comfort to you," replied Clara, softened into a greater degree of familiarity than she had ever before used, by the earnest gratitude expressed in his countenance and voice. "Oh! how glad you will be to find yourself at home again, and in the midst of those who love you! I almost envy your feelings at returning to your sweet pleasant home after all the dust and smoke and weariness of London. How delighted you will be to see them all! And what joy you will feel at seeing the joy you cause!"

"Yes, Miss Meddows, so I shall indeed," returned Charles, musingly. "But I should be more delighted still if it were not for one thing that makes me feel very uncomfortable."

"And what is that, Mr. Chesterfield?" inquired Clara. Charles shook his head, and smiled somewhat sorrowfully; and then, after the pause of a moment, said, with very ingenuous sincerity—"If you would call me Charles again, Miss Meddows, I think I should have courage enough to tell you, and I should like to do so very much, for I feel as if I wanted good advice. I think you would be able to tell me in a moment what I ought and what I ought not to do: I am sure I should be easier if I were to tell you about it, and there is nothing in the world to prevent my doing it."

"Then do it, Charles," replied the young lady, smiling. "I assure you I feel that you are paying me a great compliment, and I shall be anxious to prove that I deserve it. If my advice can really be useful to you, I shall rejoice."

"Then you shall know all—all, I mean, that weighs upon my mind, and makes me feel that I shall not be quite happy, even at home. But before you can quite understand this, Miss Meddows, I must tell you that before the legacy was left to me we were a very happy family indeed, without any secrets at all; and I cannot help thinking that this must always be a great cause of happiness in a house, because if nobody has any secrets to hide, nobody can be afraid to speak what comes into their head, and that makes every thing gay. So you see, Miss Clara, I have never been used to have any secrets to keep, and therefore, perhaps, you won't wonder at my feeling uneasy at having one to carry home with me?"

"No, indeed, my good friend," replied Clara; "nothing, I think, can be more natural; and, without hearing any more about it, I feel inclined to think that whatever may be the secret which weighs upon your mind, your best course will be to destroy it at once, by not permitting it to remain a secret. I am sure that

were I you, I should open my heart to my brother; it must be a great comfort to have a brother."

"It is indeed, especially such a brother as mine. But now comes the difficulty, Miss Meddows. Sir George (all my secret is about Sir George, so you see I have nothing to be ashamed of) particularly said that none of my family must know it. If it was not for that I should not mind it. If I was but at liberty to tell my good brother Christopher, I don't think I should be so miserable about the rest, at least not just for a little while; for, I will answer for it, he would manage to break it to my father before long."

The mention of her father made Clara start. Till then she had felt that she should be as well pleased to keep her young friend to generalities, avoiding the discussion of his private concerns, which he seemed desirous of leading her to. But now a restless and painful anxiety seized upon her; she sat steadfastly silent, however, feeling almost guilty, from her eager desire to know what it was evident her father was particularly anxious to conceal. But poor Clara's fears were already alive and awake on every subject in which he was concerned; nor did it require more words than young Chesterfield had already uttered to rouse again the pecuniary terrors on his account from which she had suffered on his first introduction. Her silence did not long impede the communication of all she most dreaded to hear; for the ice once broken, Charles required no greater encouragement than her listening attitude to make him proceed with the whole story.

"Well then, Miss Meddows, the secret, after all, is only this: Sir George, who, as of course I need not tell you, is certainly the most complete man of business in the world, knowing that as soon as I came of age I had the right and the power to do what I liked with my money, most kindly entered into conversation with me about it; and, knowing what a very small interest the stocks bring in, proposed, with the greatest liberality, to take the whole of the money himself upon his own personal security. I am sure I can never be grateful enough for his taking so much trouble about me, not to mention his generosity in paying such interest for it as would amount to three times as much as I should receive from the funds. You won't want me to tell you what my answer was, Miss Meddows? Only I declare to you I felt so overpowered by his generous kindness, that I was hardly able to answer at all. I felt tears in my eyes, I promise you; and had I not," he added, with a sigh,—"had I not had good reason, as you know, to doubt my powers, as a poet, I am sure that I should have recorded the transaction in verse. Every thing was soon settled between us, and your good father was gayer after-

wards than I have seen him for a long time. His kind heart was rejoiced, I know, at having done a generous action. But then came the drawback, Miss Clara. Sir George had more than one kind motive for asking me to place my money in his hands. You remember all about that foolish business with Mrs. Sherbourne, and the trouble I was in about it when I came down to Brighton?"

"Perfectly!" replied Clara, articulating even that single word with difficulty, and feeling so sick and faint as to make the sitting upright a task requiring great exertion.

"And perhaps you remember, too, that more than once before you left Brighton, your father was so kind as to say, but without fully explaining himself, that he had thought upon a scheme for getting me out of the scrape,—something that was to put Mrs. Sherbourne's absurd notions out of her head?"

Clara bowed her head in assent, but attempted not to speak.

"Well then, I think I can make you understand it all. Sir George says, and I am quite sure he is right, that Mrs. Sherbourne never cared a farthing for me, excepting for the sake of my legacy, and that she only threatens to bring an action against me for the sake of getting damages out of it. The best and only way to stop her, therefore, was to place my money where, as your father tells me, she could not get it, and by his advice I have written to tell her that this is done. But notwithstanding all I have said against secrecy, Miss Meddows, I have a very particular reason for not liking that any of this nonsense about Mrs. Sherbourne should be known at Maplesbury. But Sir George says that if I will not tell *that*, which was his principal reason, you see, for advising me to place the money in his hands; I must not let my father, or any of my family, know that he has got the money at all. He says that he is sure my father would not take it well that the transaction should have been completed without his knowledge. But he is quite mistaken, Miss Clara; I am positive that my father would be proud and happy to think that Sir George had undertaken the management of my little fortune. Don't you think that you could persuade Sir George to give me back my promise about not telling of his having my money, without insisting that I should tell this disagreeable history about Mrs. Sherbourne too?"

The only reply made by Clara to this appeal was a deep groan; and at the same moment dropping her head upon her arms as they rested on the table, she remained as motionless as if she had fainted.

Charles was greatly terrified. He thought that this was the case, that she was suddenly taken ill; and though longing to call her maid to her assistance, he dared not leave her, even to reach the bell, lest she should fall from her chair.

“Dear, dear Miss Clara! Can you not speak? May I lay you on the sofa? Do you hear me? Can you speak to me?”

Greatly was he relieved at seeing her raise her head from the table; but the first glance he obtained of her face renewed all his alarm, for it was as white as marble, and wore an expression of such broken-hearted misery as wrung his very heart. Pity, astonishment, and alarm, might all be found in the accent with which he exclaimed—“O merciful Heaven! What can I have said to make you look so miserable?”

Poor Clara had indeed not fainted; on the contrary, she had never been more fully in possession of all her senses; and after a moment she replied,

“I am not quite well, Mr. Chesterfield;” and presently added, with recovered calmness, “Let me beg you, my good friend, to leave me now. But do not mention the subject we have been talking about to any body, till you have seen me again. Let that be at four o’clock to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Chesterfield, in this room, if you please. I hope that I shall feel better then, and be able to give you some advice that may be useful. Say nothing further to me now, for I am not well.”

Charles looked anxiously in her face, but, seeing that her colour was returning, no longer resisted her command.

“I will come here exactly at the hour you bid me,” he said gently, and then quitted the room.

At the very moment that Charles Chesterfield had presented himself at the door of Clara’s sitting-room, she had just come to a decision as to the answer she should give her father respecting the loan he had requested from her. If poor Clara felt for her unworthy parent little of the tenderness which might be supposed likely to influence such a decision, it must not be attributed to her as hardness of nature, or as any deficiency in that first and fondest of all known affection which binds a child to its parent. The greatest misery of her sad existence was the consciousness that she could never feel this more. Gifted with a quickness of perception which had long made all hope, all doubt, respecting his real character impossible, and endowed with a fineness of the moral sense which at once made the glory of her character and the torture of her life, she had no waverings as to its being right or wrong to leave herself without the means of existence, in order to enable him for a short time longer to indulge his vices. Had this been the question, she would have told him now, as in fact she had almost promised her aunt she would do, in case of need, that she considered it to be her duty, under the circumstances in which she found herself, carefully to preserve to herself, and perhaps to him, the means of existence.

But unhappily this was no longer the question. It remained for her on the present occasion to decide, not whether she was most strongly called upon by duty to deliver over her little fortune to her father, or to retain it in her own hands, but whether any pecuniary advantage whatever could atone to her for the agony of knowing that her name and race were disgraced for ever in the eyes of Arthur Dalrymple.

At the moment Charles Chesterfield entered, she had made up her mind that it could not; and if she listened to him as he opened the conversation with more cheerfulness than might have been expected in her situation, it was owing to the feeling which cheered her heart, despite the wretched prospect before her, because she had the power of sacrificing her own interest to that of one whom she loved so very much better than herself.

But Chesterfield's tale almost turned her to stone. Frequently as she had suspected from time to time that her father contemplated this most nefarious piece of treachery, circumstances had repeatedly occurred which appeared to disprove it, all of which had been eagerly welcomed by her, and permitted, probably, to make more impression than they really deserved. The statement she had listened to in the morning would have appeared to her more terrible still, had it not seemed to offer proof, that notwithstanding the present distressing pressure upon him, Sir George had decided against applying to Charles. But now that her long-combated fears came upon her in the terrible shape of proved realities, she felt all the hateful iniquity of the transaction ten thousand times more strongly than ever. The ingenuous statement of the poor deluded youth, who had been stripped of his all solely by his confidence in the honour of her father, fell upon her ear like

“The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man,
That, swift as quicksilver, it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body;
And with a sudden vigour, it doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood.”

It threw her, in fact, into a state a thousand times worse than fainting; for though, for some moments, her bodily strength seemed palsied, her mind was working with agonising activity.

Terrible was the first hour which followed the closing of the door that shut her in for solitary meditation. For the first part of the time her harassed spirits permitted her to see nothing clearly; she fancied herself unable to decide what she ought to do. Feelings and reasonings, all at war with each other, most grievously tormented her; and the more so because a sort of

latent consciousness whispered to her all the while that she ought to know how to act, despite of all the contradictory feelings which assailed her.

But by degrees this wretched state of vacillation gave way before her honest sense of right. Great wrong had been done both to the rich Dalrymple and the poor Chesterfield; but though the pecuniary amount of each might be nearly the same, the real injury committed could hardly be brought into comparison. It was not, however, without a fearful pang that she permitted herself to settle down into the resolution of devoting her fortune to the liquidation of the claim that was most imperative on her humanity as well as her honour, for that resolution involved a sort of moral necessity that she should never see, or even wish to see, Arthur Dalrymple more. Yet even so, the decision brought relief, as decision always does; and no sooner was it fully made than Clara bent all her thoughts and all her energy to the consideration of the manner in which her righteous purpose could be best effected.

It was now about four o'clock; too late she thought to transact any business in the city, but not too late to pay a visit to a very honest and thoroughly respectable stock-broker, who lived in Gower-street, and with whom she had been made acquainted by her aunt, who, from the hour she had put on what she was wont when in a playful vein to call "the cap of liberty," *i. e.* her widow's weeds, had shown herself in truth and spirit as completely a person of business as her more volatile brother affected to be.

Never, upon any occasion, whether great or little, had she accepted any of the fraternal offers of service in the management of her money concerns which the attentive Sir George had so assiduously made her. Mr. Stephen Barton had been her only agent, and her only confidant, in the various money transactions which she had found it necessary to perform; and Clara, also, at her recommendation, had in like manner called upon him for his assistance whenever she required any thing in his line.

To this Mr. Stephen Barton she now determined to address herself, and with courage that did her honour, for never in her life had she ventured upon such an independent proceeding before. She put on a sea-side bonnet, and quiet-looking shawl, sallied forth alone, walked as far as Oxford-street, called a hackney-coach, gave the address, and drove to his house in Gower-street.

The old gentleman was just returned from the city to dinner, and being summoned to his drawing-room to attend a young lady, looked most unfeignedly surprised when he recognised Miss Meddows.

He bowed low, and hoped Sir George and her aunt were well.

“Quite well, Sir, thank you. You are surprised, Mr. Barton, at seeing me here without Mrs. Longuéville,” she replied; “but you will be still more so when I tell you the business upon which I am come. I want you to transfer for me to-morrow morning, at the very earliest hour at which it can be done, four thousand pounds sterling.”

The eye-brows of the excellent Mr. Barton mounted to the verge of his wig. A private marriage, I am afraid, Miss Meddows?”

“Nothing of the kind, I assure you, sir,” was her firm reply.

“Then, for God’s sake, my dear young lady, what can you want four thousand pounds for?”

Clara felt a little tempted to cut the matter short by looking dignified, and saying that she had come thither to have her business transacted, and not discussed; but she looked in the old gentleman’s face, and read at least as much kindness as curiosity there; whereupon she said gently, but with perfect decision of manner,

“I know it is impossible, Mr. Barton, that you can receive such a commission without surprise; nor have I any right to suppose that you know me well enough to prevent your suspecting some great imprudence in a transaction so important, while apparently unauthorised by my friends. I am sorry for this, because I respect you, and would wish that you should respect me. But the imperative nature of the duty which, as I conceive, obliges me to take this step, forbids my listening to any scruples which might interfere with it; and it is therefore, my dear sir, that I am compelled to say that this business *must* be done for me, and with as little delay as possible.”

Though there was much of kindness and respect in the tone with which this was uttered, there was so much of authority also that the good broker brought down his eyebrows, made another low bow, and replied, “Miss Meddows, I will not deny that the apparently unadvised manner in which you set about this important business makes it painful to me to assist you in it. I wish I could persuade you to take more time to think of it. You shake your head. It would be folly not to obey your order, madam, for you are your own mistress, and, if I will not do it, another will. Moreover, it is very fitting I should remember that I am not your legal adviser, but your obedient broker only.”

To this Clara made no other reply than by entering at once into the technicalities of the business in hand. She now informed Mr. Barton that the sum she had mentioned was to be transferred to the name of Charles Chesterfield.

“Charles Chesterfield!” echoed the old gentleman. “Why it

is hardly a week ago since I sold out for Charles Chesterfield the very same sum, or near it."

"That transaction I presume, sir, does in nowise legally interfere with this," observed Miss Meddows, with the very haughtiest look and tone that it was in her power to assume, and which she felt to be absolutely needful in order to cut short all discussion.

"Not the least in the world, madam," replied the old man, somewhat offended by her manner, and quite determined to interfere no further. "Not the least in the world, Miss Meddows. The business shall be done among the earliest transactions of the morning, and vouchers to that effect shall be forwarded to you. Are you still in Bruton-street, madam, residing with Sir George Meddows, your father?"

"Yes, sir. My father talks of letting the house, but for the present we are still there. It is a great object, with me, Mr. Barton, to get these vouchers before three o'clock to-morrow. May I depend upon this, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Meddows, you certainly may."

"Then now, Mr. Barton, I must wish you good morning; but ere I depart, let me remove from your mind, if my solemn assurance can do it, the painful impression which I am sure you have received, that you are aiding and abetting in a blameable transaction. I do pledge you my honour, sir, that this is not the case."

The old man looked at her earnestly, and something a little approaching to a smile moved his features, as he presented his arm to conduct her down stairs. But Clara saw it not; and, once more repeating her civil farewell, stepped into her hackney-coach, leaving the worthy broker very satisfactorily convinced that she had spoken truly, and that nothing more blameable was afoot, than her being about to dispose of her hand in lawful marriage to this said Charles Chesterfield. As to the rather puzzling ins and outs of this four thousand pounds transaction, he could make nothing of it, except the aforesaid conclusion, that a marriage between the parties was about to take place, and that the sale on one side, and the transfer on the other, were necessary preliminaries to it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

More confidential Interviews.

MR. BARTON was faithful to his promise; the vouchers reached Clara considerably before three o'clock, and, punctually at four, Charles Chesterfield again presented himself at the door of her sitting-room.

Though she had thus far proceeded very successfully, and performed a very important portion of the business before her,

it was not all done yet; one delicate and difficult manœuvre remained—namely, the making Charles understand that his money was restored to him, without stating the disgraceful fact, that without her interference it would have been lost to him for ever. She was nerved for the undertaking, however, and welcomed her visiter with a smile.

“Thank God!” exclaimed Charles, with most sincere pleasure at seeing her so well recovered from the terrible seizure he had witnessed yesterday. “How glad I am, Miss Meddows, to see you look so like yourself again!”

“Thank you, my good friend, I am much better, and I think I shall be quite well if I find you ready to follow my advice.”

“I will do any thing and every thing you wish, my dear Miss Clara,” he replied eagerly, though not without a feeling of surprise at hearing her thus unequivocally say that her health depended on his conduct. She either perceived or guessed that this was the case, and hastened to say—“You must be puzzled to understand, Charles, why I should be so very anxious about your affairs as to make them a matter of health or sickness with me. Let me explain this to you. From the hour in which I first heard my father’s project of bringing you to London I disapproved of it, and would gladly have prevented it, had it been possible; but we had not become such good friends then, Charles, as we are now, and therefore I could not at that time take the same friendly liberty with you which, if you do not forbid it, I mean to do now. May I hope that you will not forbid my taking this liberty?”

“Forbid it! O Miss Clara! Can you doubt that I shall be both proud and happy to listen to you!”

“I do not want to make you proud, my good friend, but most truly I wish you to be happy, and I am certainly the more anxious about it, because I am persuaded that your happiness has been very greatly endangered by your accompanying us to town.”

This was too true to be contradicted, and Charles replied to it only by a sigh.

“Now then, hear me, Charles Chesterfield,” resumed Clara, almost solemnly; “the information which you gave me yesterday shocked me greatly, because it made me foresee a great deal of domestic unhappiness for yourself and your family, all, or nearly all of which I cannot but attribute to your unfortunate journey with us; with such an idea, you will do me the justice to believe that I could not feel happy without endeavouring to set things right again. In the first place, let me have the pleasure of assuring you that you have nothing whatever to fear from Mrs. Sherbourne. When you saw me receive her here, I was ignorant

of the facts I have since heard concerning her. It is supposed that her husband is still alive, and, moreover, her conduct has been such as to prevent the possibility of her appearing in court with such a claim as you speak of. Should it ever be necessary, I shall be able to furnish you with references for the establishment of these facts; meanwhile, trust me, you have no need of any further protection against her. It follows, therefore, as you must perceive, that your selling your property out of the funds without the knowledge of your father was a very hasty and imprudent measure, and one that cannot but give him and all your family great disappointment, pain, and mortification, from the proof it seems to offer of your total want of confidence in them. Surely you must be aware of this yourself?"

Charles absolutely groaned as he listened to these true but killing words. "Alas, Miss Meddows! why did I do this deed without consulting you? I see it all now! My poor father will be wounded to the very heart! They never, never will believe again that I love them better than all the world beside. It is too late now; the deed is done, and cannot be undone, and I not only feel wretched, but guilty."

"Not so, Mr. Chesterfield; happily I have it in my power to set all right again. You are perhaps not aware that I have a small independent fortune of my own: this has enabled me to transfer four thousand pounds into your name in the funds. The business is already completed, and here are the vouchers."

Charles was very far from guessing at the nature or extent of the benefit which the generous Clara thus conferred upon him; but the, having to return to Maplebury with his fortune *in statu quo*, and with no secret concerning it on his mind, was a degree of happiness that seemed sufficient to drive him almost wild with joy and gratitude. Clara witnessed this joy with lively pleasure, and blessed Heaven that she had saved one victim from the ruin that seemed closing round him. It was necessary, however, or at any rate exceedingly desirable, that Chesterfield should leave London immediately. At an early hour on the following morning it would be necessary for her to inform her father of the transaction which had put it out of her power to afford him any further help; and though it was evident that Charles had suffered too much to render it likely he should fall into the same scrape anew (ignorant though he was of its real nature), she greatly desired to avoid the possibility of his being again attacked by Sir George; an event which she doubted not would happen, were they to meet after her father knew that the money had been restored to him.

It was this part of her task which she felt to be the most diffi-

cult, inasmuch as she could by no means assign her real motives for urging his immediate departure. Aware, however, that she must at this moment have great influence with him, she determined to use it, whether he thought her reasonable or not; and therefore addressed him with something like the authority of an elder sister.

“The pleasure you express at this arrangement delights me, Mr. Chesterfield, for it proves that I was right in thinking that the imprudence you had committed would make your return home very painful to you. I know that you feel grateful to me for having set it all right for you, and I am quite certain that you will comply with my wish that you should leave town either by to-night’s mail or the early coach to-morrow. I should be sorry for you to see my father after he knows what I have done, which he will do when we meet at breakfast to-morrow morning, for I have business to transact with him which will then render the disclosure of it inevitable. You will dine with us to-day, and may then mention having already taken your place. I hope you have no serious objection to this hasty departure?”

“None in the world, Miss Meddows,” he replied, in a voice of such gladness that a smile of pleasure once more lit up the lovely but sad features of poor Clara. “I will go this very moment,” he said, “and secure a place for to-night, and then run to Baker-street to pay a parting visit to the Gibsons; less, perhaps, from gratitude,” he added, with a smile, “than from a wish to let Mrs. Sherbourne know, as I am sure she will through them, that I am peaceably departed without having any fear of her before my eyes.”

Having thus testified his ready obedience, he set off, leaving Clara perfectly satisfied with what she had done, but knowing herself to be utterly destitute; certain of having her race and name disgraced for ever and for ever in the eyes of Arthur Dalrymple; and anticipating, with no very agreeable feelings, the interview which awaited her with her father on the morrow. Still she was satisfied, and felt no shadow of regret for the sacrifice she had made.

Charles proceeded with the active step of youth and joy to execute the business before him, and smiled musingly at his own delight when he had succeeded in securing a place for Gloucester by that night’s coach. “How strange it is,” thought he, “that eight short months should make so complete a change in me. I have been disappointed in all my hopes, yet I feel the happiest fellow in the world. And I am going to leave London, probably for ever, with even greater joy than I felt when I came into it! Dear, dear, Miss Meddows! All the misery I have endured I have

owed to myself; but for all my happiness I must thank Heaven and her."

From the coach-office he repaired to Baker-street, where he found the Gibson family already returned from their hated dwelling in the country. It was evident that his day of favour there had passed,—a discovery which he bore with great fortitude; but the assiduous reading of the four young ladies, (Marianna had very quietly married her cousin about a month before,) and the uninterrupted industry of their mamma, who hardly raised her eyes from the mass of appropriate engravings which Mr. Marchmont had kindly collected for her Milton during her absence, rendered it difficult for him to sustain any conversation whatever, and he felt himself obliged to abandon his scheme of naming Mrs. Sherbourne, and sending by them such a message as she must, though they might not, understand.

Fortunately, however, he met Mr. Gibson on the landing-place, and as the disgrace of Charles with Mr. Marchmont was one of the many bits of gossip discussed only *en petit comité*, he had never heard of it. Remembering, therefore, his former favour with his lady, and still better the friendship expressed for him by Mr. Dalrymple, the unsuspecting father and husband received him with all his former zealous hospitality, and immediately asked him to dinner.

"I cannot dine with you, Mr. Gibson," he replied, "but I should be glad to have five minutes' chat with you in the front drawing-room, if you please?"

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly," replied the master of the house, throwing open the door of the cold and deserted apartment, and suddenly taking it into his head that it was very likely the young man was come to propose for one of his daughters. "I am afraid you will find it very cold; however, it shall be just as you please—either here or in the next room with the fire and the ladies—just as you please, Mr. Chesterfield, I am delighted to see you in any way."

"You are very obliging, sir, and I shall not detain you in the cold for a moment. But I wished to shake hands with you, Mr. Gibson, before I leave London, and to thank you for your kindness to me; and I also wished to request you would have the goodness, when you see Mrs. Sherbourne, to tell her that I am returned to my family in Gloucestershire. Here is my address, Mr. Gibson, and that if she has any further communications to make to me, I can receive them there."

"Going—are you really?" returned the disappointed father; "then there is no more to be said—and I wish you very well, sir, in your health till we meet again. And I am to give this to

Mrs. Sherbourne, am I? I won't fail, you may depend upon it. My best regards to Mr. Dalrymple, when you see him. Good morning, sir, good morning."

Rather before Charles was fairly out of the house, Mr. Gibson had ventured to enter the sacred conclave of the back drawing-room for the purpose of discussing with his charming woman-kind the departure of Mr. Dalrymple's young friend, Charles Chesterfield, and also of showing the address he had left for Mrs. Sherbourne.

"Funny, isn't it, my love, his leaving his address for her?"

"It is extremely absurd," returned Mrs. Gibson, "and just like such a country oaf as he has shown himself. Give it to me, Gibson; I will take care it shall get to her;—I am certain of seeing, or sending to her."

The evening, as usual, brought Mr. Marchmont, who, faithful as the needle to the pole, rarely passed a day without pouring a portion of his noble thoughts, and little anxieties, his magnificent imaginings, and his small realities, into the gently-tender but exemplarily-discreet bosom of his devoted friend.

The mention of the rebellious young man's farewell visit, and the exhibition of the address left for Mrs. Sherbourne, seemed by no means devoid of interest in the eyes of the Regenerator, and he even condescended to say,—“Give me the bit of paper, dear friend, and I will take it to her. I shall see her on a matter of business to-morrow, so I may save you any further trouble about it.”

* * * * *

It is to be hoped that Mrs. Sherbourne's literary engagement with Mr. Marchmont has not been forgotten by the courteous reader. This engagement, indeed, though not laying claim to novelty, inasmuch as something exceedingly similar to it recently occurred in Paris, was of a nature sufficiently remarkable to deserve some little attention, and therefore, while our hero wends his rumbling way to his native shades, the termination of it shall be briefly recorded.

Not quite comprehending how a lady, in the peculiar state of mind of Mrs. Sherbourne, could have any interest in the whereabouts of such a personage as Charles Chesterfield, Mr. Marchmont's first care on the following morning was to make a visit to the cell of the self-condemned in Mount-street.

Mrs. Sherbourne, notwithstanding her mortuary state of mind, was little changed in dress or manner since we last parted from her. The entire collection of her various charms was as much at her command as ever; nevertheless, when Mr. Marchmont entered, the only one of all the enchanting throng permitted to

appear was gentle desponding languor. The delicate left hand hung listlessly by her side, while the delicate right hand held a pen suspended over a sheet of half-covered paper, as if waiting for the inspiration that should set it in motion. Her large eyes were raised to greet him, but then fell again as if the very lids sought repose, while her very ringlets seemed to droop in sorrow, and her drapery, too, carelessly arranged, evidently shared the same species of desponding listlessness which pervaded her whole appearance. She intended to look like a lily on a broken stalk—and perhaps she did.

“I hope you are better to-day in health and spirits, Mrs. Sherbourne?” said the Regenerator, who, having determined immediately to print her memoirs in weekly numbers, began to fear that the promised catastrophe would be delayed longer than might be convenient, and that it was high time to enquire about it.

“Better?—Yes, much better, Mr. Marchmont. Better by the hours that I have drawn nearer to my longed-for end!”

“You still go on writing, I see. If you really persevere in your shocking intention, my dear Mrs. Sherbourne, it is extraordinary that you should have strength and spirits for it,” said the purchaser of her memoirs, looking at her with rather a suspicious glance.

“I have yet an object for which to live a few weeks longer,” she replied. “In preparing for the event which is about to come upon me, and dividing papers which I wish to destroy, from others that may perhaps prove of some interest when I am no more, I chanced to light upon a correspondence between myself and one of the chief actors in that peculiarly interesting transaction, which took place some years ago, between a certain lord and lady whose adventures I think never will be forgotten while the language lasts. Every letter of the whole series is preserved. They are full of piquant anecdotes, and my object is to incorporate the whole into the narrative of my own eventful life.—“You know these names, Mr. Marchmont?”

Mrs. Sherbourne languidly, and as if by a strong effort, turned towards him the unfinished page, and pointed to the words he was to read, though her delicate fingers trembled as she did so.

“Know them? Egad, their names, at least, are no great mystery. You are quite right, Mrs. Sherbourne, if you can bring out any thing new on that subject, not to omit it. It will be a great addition.”

“It is agony to me now to labour at any thing. But there is a poor old woman, who nursed my sickly infancy, for whom I am determined to make a small sum before my lips open to receive what fools call poison, but which I call peace. If you will pay me

for these pages you shall have them, Marchmont. I have no earthly tribunal to fear, and therefore I have written boldly. The pages on this subject I know are worth their weight in gold. What will you give me for them?"

"We will talk of that presently, Mrs. Sherbourne," replied the Regenerator. "But I want you to explain to me, why you, in your very peculiar and melancholy situation, should think it worth while to enter into correspondence with a young fellow like Charles Chesterfield. What can be your motive for it?"

"He has made you his confidant, has he?" exclaimed the lady with sudden energy, and losing in an instant every trace of languor. "A pretty puppy, isn't he? But if you are his friend and adviser, Mr. Marchmont, be pleased to tell him that I have not done with him yet, and that if he is a wise man, he will come to me immediately. His doing so may save him from the most fatal exposure and dishonour."

"What am I to think, Mrs. Sherbourne, of this sudden change of manner? Of this explicit avowal of your interest in one so very little fitted to be in your confidence at this awful period? Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed, looking earnestly in her face. "Have I been fooled out of my money? are you suddenly losing your senses, madam? or do you really sit there to laugh at me?"

The lady burst forth at these words into a vehement but well-arranged paroxysm of laughter; and she had not looked more enchanting for years, for this was one of the prettiest things she did, displaying her fine teeth, and permitting sundry capricious involutions of person, all of which displayed advantageously some favourite grace.

The Regenerator was perfectly overpowered by his indignation, and it was some time before he could recover himself sufficiently to speak; but at length he said, "Madam! this is swindling. Are you aware of it? Are you aware of the pains and penalties attached by the law to the act of raising money under false pretences? Are you aware of it?"

"My dear sir," replied the lady in the sweetest accents possible, and retaining no more of her offensive merriment than was expressed in a most charming smile—"My dear Mr. Marchmont, do you intend to go to law with me, in case I should happen to decline killing myself?"

The Regenerator rose from his chair, snatched his hat, gave her one look of extraordinary eloquence, and rushed out of the house without even pausing to close the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Charles Chesterfield sets off for his native Shades—Sir George Meddows shows himself superior to Circumstances—He exhibits great Ability in many Ways.

ON returning to Bruton-street to dine, Charles received from the servant who opened the door for him a note containing these words :

“DEAR MR. CHESTERFIELD,—You must forgive my not bidding you farewell in person, as I do not feel well enough to leave my room. Accept my best wishes for your health, welfare, and happiness in all ways, and believe me,

“Very sincerely your friend,

“CLARA MEDDOWS.”

This was a disappointment : Charles Chesterfield's attachment to Miss Meddows was very strong—his admiration of her unbounded—his esteem perfect—and his affection such as her unceasing kindness to him deserved. Though without the shadow of a suspicion as to the real importance of the service she had just rendered him, and the tremendous self-sacrifice it involved, his memory was deeply impressed by a hundred comparatively trifling proofs of her kindness, and it is no idle figure of speech to say that he would have died to serve her. Tears sprang to his eyes as he put her precious little note in his pocket-book, and he determined to take the liberty of answering it, when he could give her friendly heart the satisfaction of knowing that he was once more happy in the midst of his family, to which she had restored him as unbroken in fortune as unchanged in heart.

Mrs. Longuéville made her appearance at dinner in a dishabille which made her look a dozen years older than the startled Charles had ever conceived her to be ; she appeared, moreover, exceedingly out of spirits, eating little, and speaking less. Sir George, on the contrary, was remarkably gay ; when Charles announced his immediate departure, he rallied him on being home-sick ; but added that he was not altogether wrong in taking himself off at full speed, as it was a known fact that Noah's preparations for going into the ark, notwithstanding his being followed by so large and heterogeneous a train, were just nothing in comparison to the fuss and bustle of an English family of distinction preparing to go abroad. “There is Clara, you see, absolutely fallen sick of it ; and Mrs. Longuéville, as pale as a ghost and as silent as the tomb from which she seems to have escaped, speaks not, and eats not, nor even

‘Turning her round,
Sends some pudding away to be fried!’

In truth I am the only one of the family equal to the sort of thing. And be sure to tell your good father, Charles, that though this arrangement has been made chiefly for the sake of my health, I never was in better spirits in my life. I know the good old gentleman has a great regard for me, and he will like to hear it. Tell him too, Charles, with my kind regards, that rents are looking up in the south of Ireland, and I expect to increase my income there next year very considerably—and that's no bad news, either for him or for me."

Sir George here laid down his knife and fork, which, notwithstanding his lively talk, had been far from idle, and tearing off the back of a letter which he took from his pocket, drew forth a gold pencil-case, and wrote a few lines which he pushed towards Charles. The young man took it up, and read—"Not a word, remember, to any of them about the mortgage—at least, not till their hearing of Mrs. Sherbourne's affair becomes a matter of indifference to you." Charles coloured a little, but bowed his head in token of obedience, while Sir George again held out his hand to receive the confidential scrap. A hasty cup of coffee, ordered with that sort of *empressement* which testifies a desire of omitting no attention to the parting guest, was the last hospitality our hero received in Bruton-street; the next moment brought a cab for him to the door, and after receiving a vigorous shake of the hand, and great abundance of good wishes, he set off, certainly without a single feeling of regret, to seek once more the fields and the friends he had left so lightly.

His first sensations at finding himself actually *en route* for Maplebury were delightful, and he fell asleep as the coach rolled on, amidst the most delicious anticipations imaginable. But on waking the next morning, and being answered, when he inquired where they were, by the pronouncing of one or two familiar, neighbourly names, he felt a qualm of doubt, and something like shame came over him as he remembered how very soon he should stand before Bessy, and Mr. Westbrook, and father, and mother, and Kit, and Susan, and all of them.

But we must leave him for a time,

"Thus balancing his fear and hope,"

while we turn back to the generous friend he had left in Bruton-street. Clara remained in her room during the whole of the evening which followed his departure. She looked forward to her interview with her father with a feeling of dread that rendered her quite incapable of sustaining conversation with him or her aunt; but she spent the time in such a review of her own situation, and her own conduct and motives, as gave her something like the strength of despair in the first case, and all the consola-

tion of humble but steadfast self-approval in the second. Thus fortified, she very punctually kept her appointment on the following morning, and found Sir George in a state of spirits hovering between playful gaiety and tender fondness, already waiting to receive her.

Clara trembled:—not that she feared her father—fear was not a sentiment with which he had ever inspired her; but she felt that it was very dreadful to see the author of her being standing before her to await a most important sentence, which sentence she had placed herself under the necessity of giving against him.

“My sweet Clara! why did we not see you last evening?” said the baronet, taking her hand, and leading her to a chair.

“I was not well, sir,” she replied; but in a voice so husky as made her fear her own power of uttering what she wished to say.

“I hope, dear,” said Sir George, playfully caressing her curls, “that you have not been tormenting yourself about this mighty matter of a loan that I mentioned to you? Positively, Clara, I shall laugh at you unmercifully, as the most moody little miser in existence, if you have. You are still a child, my Clara, in all matters of business, and know no more about my property, and the state of my affairs, than a baby. This, however, is quite as much my fault as yours; I have never thought of making you look sober and solemn for hours together, by the rehearsal of my acres in this county, or my houses in another. You know the unfortunate fact that they are all entailed; a principle of duty (which, I thank Heaven, is the compass by which I always steer) rendered it imperative upon me to let you know this. But all minor details I have suffered, till now, to remain unexplained. Can you give me patient hearing, my queen, while I tell you a little what I can, and what I cannot do, with my property?”

“I should hear you not only patiently, but with much pleasure, father, through any details which might give me hope that your affairs were in a condition to justify the expectation of their being favourably adjusted. And even without such hope, you shall ever find a willing listener in me, whenever you shall feel an inclination to confide in me. But on the present occasion, I am compelled to tell you that no ——”

“Stop, Clara! Before you answer me in such an accent as that,” cried Sir George, suddenly interrupting her, “let me briefly tell you that the loan of the money which I have condescended to sue for, rather than command—which, as a father, I unquestionably have a right to do—will be attended with not the slightest risk whatever. You are such an ignorant little puss, that I doubt if you ever knew that I have estates in Ireland. Are you aware of this, Clara?”

"No, sir," replied his unhappy daughter, sick at heart at the horrible necessity of listening thus to the degrading duplicity of her parent, and almost hoping that he was not aware how perfectly she knew him.

"I thought so. This is too bad, upon my soul, Clara, and I am positively ashamed of my share in such stultified ignorance of what very nearly concerns you. For though unhappily my Irish estates are entailed, as well as the rest, and therefore never can be yours, yet still the fact that I have an unlimited right to cut down timber, is very important to you, especially on occasion of this loan, as it enables me to give you the most unobjectionable security for the money I have desired you to let me have—though, faith, I believe you are the only daughter who would require it."

Clara had too often listened to her aunt's dissertations on the family property, to be in the slightest degree deceived by this flourish; and her courage rising with the indignation naturally aroused by a statement so utterly false, she replied, almost without faltering—"No security, father, can enable me to bring forward money which I no longer possess. I have already sold stock to the amount of four thousand pounds sterling."

"Sold stock to the amount of four thousand pounds sterling?" reiterated Sir George, perfectly aghast, and suddenly turning almost as pale as his daughter. "And what, in Heaven's name, girl, have you done with it. I presume that you will not deny my right to ask this?"

"I have made it over to Charles Chesterfield," replied Clara, firmly, "in payment of the same amount lent by him to you."

The rage, indignation, and astonishment of Sir George at receiving this answer seemed for awhile to deprive him of all power of utterance. He sat with his eyes fixed on the face of his daughter, as if he had not yet heard enough, and it was only upon her rising to leave the room that he recovered breath enough to utter the feelings with which he seemed bursting.

"Wretch! reptile! ungrateful viper!" he exclaimed, clenching his fists, and gnashing his teeth with a more genuine emotion of furious anger than she had ever seen him exhibit before. "Is it possible that the besotted rascal dared to approach you with such a statement of the transaction between us as could induce you to commit this mad imprudence?"

"His statement, sir, was very simple, and had nothing in it that could in any way justify your anger. He related to me what you had done, as a proof of your great kindness to him; but, probably, as it was a business which he could not suppose would not be particularly interesting to me, he would not have

named it at all had it not been for the embarrassment which your injunction to secrecy laid him under. He has repeatedly, poor youth, come to me for advice, and did so upon this occasion. He could not endure the idea of meeting his family with the burden of this secret upon his mind. He could not suppose there was any treachery in relating the transaction to me."

"And could you hit upon no less affectionate advice, Miss Meddows, for this audacious boy, than bestowing nearly the whole of your fortune upon him?" demanded her sneering father.

"It was clear that I could in no way assist him so effectually, sir," replied Clara, calmly; "and knowing that if you had security to give him, it might be transferred to me, I saw no important objection to the transaction."

"Idiot!" muttered Sir George, while the blood rushed back again to his very temples; "and what security, pray, did you think I gave him, which you so dutifully intended to demand of me for yourself?"

"I was doubtful, father, whether you had any to give him," replied Clara, gently, and turning her eyes away from him.

"And therefore you felt ready to move heaven and earth, in order to ruin yourself in time to prevent your assisting me. Daughter! I thank you."

"I felt ready to do all that was in my power to save your honour, father. It was better, in my estimation, that you should have my money in your hands, without security, than his."

Sir George now turned his head away from her. But there was at least as much of passionate indignation in the movement as of shame. "Leave me to myself," he said. "There is no stranger who passes my door, from whom I might not more reasonably hope for help in my difficulties than from you."

Poor Clara longed to ask if the money he had received from Chesterfield might not go to liquidate the claim of Arthur Dalrymple, as the transaction was too recent to suppose that it had been already disposed of elsewhere; but she felt that, in his estimation, she had done nothing to purchase his confidence, and therefore she would not ask for it; but casting one unnoticed look of sorrow, and, it may be, pity, on her unworthy parent, obeyed his mandate, and left the room.

Sir George's disappointment was great. Had his demand upon his daughter been made upon any other ostensible cause, he would have been much less confident of success; being quite aware that Clara was sufficiently awakened to the embarrassed state of his affairs to make the surrender of her little fortune to him an act of weakness of which he could scarcely believe her capable. But the keeping up a friendly unbroken intercourse

with Dalrymple he conceived to be an object important enough to furnish such a motive; and, resting his barbarous hopes on his conviction of her attachment to the man he had so grossly preyed upon, he felt little or no doubt of success.

But Sir George Meddows was of a nature not easily to be discomfited. Hard as the nether mill-stone against every feeling not altogether personal, he cared not three straws what his noble-minded daughter thought of him, and would have cared as little about the opinion of Dalrymple (feeling a pretty strong assurance that he would never take any legal measures to molest him), had it not been that he still entertained hopes of seeing the attachment which he was strongly persuaded existed between him and Clara terminate in a marriage. Often had he gaily exclaimed to Mrs. Longuéville,

“ 'Tis a very fine thing to be father-in-law
To a very magnificent three-tail'd bashaw ;”

and oftener still had he calculated the probable amount of annual accommodation, one way or another, which he might reasonably hope for, did this greatly-desired connection take place. It therefore was still a matter of importance, in the way of speculation, to keep up appearances with his late ward; and when Clara left him, he continued to sit for a considerable time in deep meditation, one foot on the hob, and the other on the top bar of the grate, gently balancing his chair on its hinder legs, and asking counsel of his wits how he should manage to settle amicably with Arthur, without spending a single farthing of his newly-acquired four thousand pounds upon it.

There was something particularly favourable to speculation in the attitude in which he had placed himself; it was a sort of see-saw between safety and danger, in which he depended wholly upon his own skill, and the nice adjustment of the balance by which he sustained his position.

“ A man must be an ass,” thought he, “ to give in, because a thing or two goes wrong with him. How many human beings are there, who, placed as I am at this moment, would be sprawling on the floor in less time than it has taken me to remember that this position is dangerous. And how many more are there, earthed up on one side, and worried and hurried on another, who would forthwith turn all their thoughts to a pair of slugs, as the best, and perhaps the only, means of relief. But may Mephistophiles himself come *in propria personâ* to drag me off to his own dominions, without the ceremony of even a bow or smile, if I permit myself to be hooted from among the sons of men for such trifles. No! The puzzle has not been tangled yet which can master me. As to Dalrymple, a word will suffice

to put him off. . . . Egad, I know what I will say to him, and there shall be a little truth in it too, by way of variety. It may do good in another way too, for what I know. . . . I have seen love and admiration fifty times over in Dalrymple's eyes, when fixed upon my peevish girl. But she has not coquetry enough to catch a fly in her ringlets, or a butterfly in her veil, and so the lad fancies himself free still. He has never had a jealous fit yet, and who knows but a little of that animating stimulant might make him speak out? We'll see. Next comes grim, starched-stiff, little Oglevy to be settled with. Confound him! He has no love to be played upon in his whole composition, except his love for the four aces, and the play with these is generally for him, not against him. This is the third time he has done me. Can it be all fair play? By Jupiter, that doubt may be worth something. How glorious would it be could I hit upon any thing *louche* in his play! If one could but get the thing up, I know a dozen who would give a finger to prove it. And where should I be then? Magnificent idea! feeling as young and as fit for Paris as ever, with four thousand clear in my pocket, that no man but myself could rob me of. You must think, think, think, Sir George Meddows—and Sir George Meddows rarely does that without coming at last to something worth having. *Nous verrons.*"

Sir George did think steadily and unremittingly for some time longer, and at first it was without changing his attitude; but by degrees he brought down first one of his handsome limbs and then the other; and then the two front legs of his chair were lodged soberly on the hearth-rug. But the less frisky his external appearance became, the more the inward man seemed exhilarated. He rubbed his hands, chuckled, muttered two or three comical words to himself, and at length laughed aloud; then springing from his chair with the sportive agility of eighteen, he seized his hat, and immediately left the house with an elasticity of step that would not have disgraced five-and-thirty.

He took his way through Bond-street, across Piccadilly, and down St. James's-street. Had any body watched his countenance as he made this progress, it would have been thought to indicate that the gay spirits in which he had quitted his own door had given way under the weight of painful meditations as he walked along. But it was not so. Sir George was only preparing himself for a scene which he intended to perform on reaching his friend Mr. Oglevy's dwelling in St. James's-place, and the different evolutions which his features went through were nothing more than rehearsals.

On arriving at his destination he had the gratification of learning that the gentleman he sought was at home, and he was

immediately ushered into the small drawing-room where he was sitting, exactly as he wished to find him—that is to say, alone.

Mr. Oglevy was a short and very thin slight-made man, with a little firm-set mouth, a long thin hooked nose, light eyes, small and deeply sunk in his head, but looking, nevertheless, as if they could do something more than merely

“Guard their master ’gainst a post.”

He appeared to be very earnestly engaged upon the leaves of an extremely neat miniature pocket-book, which, on the approach of his visitor, he rather hastily shut up, and returned to his pocket, drawing forward, at the same moment, a newspaper which lay on the table.

Sir George Meddows entered with a slow and dignified step, looking taller than usual; and though perfectly composed in his aspect and address, having the air of a man whose every movement and word was produced *avec intention*, excepting to the keen observers who have the gift (not an enviable one, perhaps) of being able to trace amidst smiles of suavity, and under a noble, or at any rate a proud, contour of physiognomy, the lines that mark the frequent action of passions and purposes degrading to the higher order of mortals,—excepting to such, Sir George Meddows had greatly the appearance of a gentleman. He looked too like a man of unflinching spirit, and, on this occasion particularly, wore an appearance of dauntless self-possession, which was strongly contrasted by the fidgety movements of the small individual he came to visit, whose appearance was in fact a contrast to that of the baronet in every respect.

“Oh!—It is you, is it, Sir George? Upon my word, I am exceedingly glad to see you,” said Mr. Oglevy, rising, and sitting down, and rising again. “I could not make out not hearing from you—could not understand it at all. It was not in the common way of doing business, Sir George, nothing at all like it, and that you must know as well as me. However, here you are at last, so of course it is all very well, and I shall never mention the delay, you may depend upon it. I have got a memorandum, Sir George, and of course you have got one too?”

“I have various notes concerning the transaction to which you allude, Mr. Oglevy, and most assuredly I should have brought them forward before, had not my health been in such a state when I left town as to induce my physicians peremptorily to forbid my giving attention to any species of business whatever,” said Sir George, with dignified solemnity.

“Glad to see you about again. Look perfectly well, sir,—perfectly well—and that’s a great comfort. But I suppose, by your

coming so early in the day, that you have a good deal to do, and I should be loath to detain you, I'm sure; so we'll settle our business at once, if you please. There is certainly no occasion for any further delay."

"Mr. Oglevy," replied Sir George, with the air of a sovereign addressing an ambassador, to whom he contemplates uttering a few hostile words before the audience is over; "Mr. Oglevy, you tell me that I look perfectly well, and in return, I am happy to tell you that I am so. Were I not, I should still, notwithstanding the sort of impatience you have been pleased to express, take the liberty of postponing a discussion which would in no way suit a sick man. At present, however, I am perfectly ready to enter upon it."

These words were pronounced with so awful a knitting of the brows, that had Sir George been a sultan and Mr. Oglevy his vizier, he must have felt certain that the bowstring would be about his neck in a very few minutes. As it was, the little man's eyes positively winked as he looked up at his tall and stately visitor; and though the long apprenticeship he had served to the mysteries of gambling had taught him that first and most needful law of the science, an eternal steadiness of face, which gave an appearance of firmness even to his diminutive *physique*, it was evident enough that he did not above half like the towering look and grandiose tone of the majestic baronet.

"A sick man! Dear me, no, Sir George. Sick men never ought to think of doing business at all, and I beg you won't take it ill that I wrote to you, for I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that I knew nothing in the world about your illness. I can't say more if it was to the king, so I hope that it is all smooth between us, and there is nothing to prevent our coming to the business that brought you here, and getting rid of it at once."

"Getting rid of it at once, Mr. Oglevy? Ay, sir, that is exactly the point I mean to come to," replied Sir George, half shutting up his eyes, and looking at him with a very singular expression from beneath his handsome eyelashes. "As a man of honour and a gentleman, I pledge you my word that the only course you can pursue with safety to your person and your character, is at once and for ever to let this matter drop. Never shall any whisper concerning it be heard from me. However indignant I may have felt, sir, at the nature of the transaction to which I am thus painfully compelled to allude, I should hold myself dishonoured if, after assuming the office of a friend in giving you counsel, I were to be myself the means of making that known which, being so vitally important to you, should be for ever concealed. Mr. Oglevy, you are still master of your own destiny; and you owe

me a debt of gratitude, such as few men can claim from a fellow creature, for having decided to permit your being so."

Sir George had been permitted to go on thus far without interruption, because Mr. Oglevy was literally too much astonished to answer him. At length the poor little man, who was almost gasping for breath, found power to say,

"What, in the name of Heaven, Sir George Meddows, do you mean?"

"This is a paltry, a very paltry attempt, Mr. Oglevy. Perhaps, after what has already passed, it ought not to surprise me; but I would fain have hoped to see you—wiser, sir."

"Do you mean to drive me mad, Sir George Meddows? Or do you only mean to amuse yourself? Pay me my money, sir; pay me my money, sir, this instant, down upon this table, either in notes or cheque, or else, by all that is sacred among men of honour, I swear to expose you in every club throughout London and Paris. Do you hear me, sir?"

"Poor man!" cried Sir George, looking at him with an expression of gentle pity. "Poor man! This is very dreadful, and terrible will be the fate you must inevitably draw upon yourself, if you proceed in this tremendous course. Think better of it, Oglevy! I cannot but remember that, though never intimate, we have known each other long, and it will be with real pain that I shall feel myself compelled, if you force me to it, to blast your character for ever!"

"Blast my character? Who dares blast my character?" screamed the little man, in a voice the weakness of which was ludicrously contrasted with his vehemence.

"That dare I, unhappy man!" returned Sir George, with one of the tremendous frowns which he had practised *en route*. "Abandon now and for ever all claim upon me, for the sum so nefariously won when last we played together, or I hereby pledge myself to destroy your social existence in every place where men of honour congregate. You shall be pointed at as the juggling trickster, as the cheating gamester, as the scoundrel blackleg, caught in the fact. This, this, is the fate which awaits you, doomed and wretched man! Say! Speak! Will you brave it? Decide at once! I will waste no further time."

Little Mr. Oglevy turned as pale as death. Sir George rated him well, and a rush of triumphant blood dyed his own face with crimson. He hardly wished for words from the trembling, agitated, death-like looking being before him. In the agony which every working feature of Oglevy betrayed, he not only read a receipt in full for all demands, but he even fancied that the guilt of which he had so boldly accused him must in some degree

exist. Pushing his triumph, therefore, he said, "Your countenance, unhappy man, leaves nothing to be acknowledged by your lips. I understand your silence as a full compliance with my demand. Thank Heaven that you have pushed your crime no further! Farewell! To my honour you may trust for the eternal oblivion of this fearful tale. Your name shall never pass my lips in connection with this painful circumstance."

Having said these words, Sir George turned to leave the apartment with the same stately mien with which he had entered it.

"You are right! you are right!" said the feeble voice of Oglevy. "I cannot speak to you!—but,—but,—you shall hear from me."

These last words were uttered in so low and sepulchral a tone as to be quite inaudible, and Sir George left the room and the house so enamoured of the skill with which he had achieved this ticklish enterprise that, in the very pride and gladness of his heart, he was tempted to exclaim, as he walked towards the lodging of Dalrymple,

"Shine out, fair sun! and be to me a glass,
That I may see my shadow as I pass."

CHAPTER XXX.

Mr. Dalrymple takes great pains to ascertain the Truth respecting a Fact in which he takes some Interest, but obtains Error instead, from the best possible Authority—An Affair of Honour.

THE baronet was again fortunate enough to find the person he sought. Dalrymple was at home in his apartments at the Albany; but he both coloured and started when he unexpectedly saw Sir George Meddows enter.

"Dear Arthur, how are you?" said the jovial baronet, holding out his hand with most affectionate cordiality. "You have been surprised at not hearing from me, I dare say; but coming is better than writing, is it not, my dear friend? Here I am to answer in full all you have written."

Mr. Dalrymple replied that he was glad to see him so perfectly recovered, and then asked him with a little hesitation if the family had returned with him to town.

"Yes, my sister and Clara are both here, and you must come and see us, Arthur. But I wish to Heaven that Clara had remained at Brighton, and that I had undertaken to make all the necessary preparations for our going abroad myself. You have no idea what a fool she has been making of herself about that lad Chesterfield that I brought to town with me last spring. Upon my soul, I hardly know what to make of it."

Dalrymple again changed colour, but said not a word in reply.

“Not that I mean to insinuate that she has fallen in love with her rustic adorer; of course she would as soon think of owning the soft impeachment *apropos* of a puppy-dog; but she feels ‘*interested*’ for him, she says; and how d’ye think she chose in her wisdom to show this interest? Just guess, Dalrymple.”

“Indeed, Sir George, it is totally out of my power to divine,” replied the young man, with haughty gravity.

“Piqued, for a thousand!” privately ejaculated Sir George; “I thought I could use my weapons so as to hit him. Then, if you will not guess, I must tell you,” said he aloud. “The boy Chesterfield, you must know, has got himself into a devilish foolish scrape with making love to that experienced little flirt, Mrs. Sherbourne, and, being threatened with damages, actually became so terrified lest his old friend the parson of the parish should think him a lost sheep that he sold out nearly all his little fortune (you remember the legacy story) in order to stop her mouth. The poor young fellow has no secrets with us, and when he told us of this foolish act Clara said not a word, but quietly went the next morning to old Barton, the family broker, you know, and positively transferred stock to the same amount from her name into his. Did you ever hear of such a piece of madcap generosity? Is it not provoking?”

Sir George again waited for an answer, and, after a moment’s delay, Mr. Dalrymple replied, “It is a transaction, Sir George, which, however generous, must probably, I conceive, be considered by you as imprudent.”

“Imprudent!—it is idiotic, Arthur. But of course I could not suffer the girl to be ruined by her folly, and I immediately decided paying the sum myself. I have no doubt that if we will give them a little time, the Chesterfields will know the story from the foolish boy himself, and repay me the money honestly enough. I could not, however, suffer my poor Clara to run any risk, and my chief reason for communicating the business to you is, to account for the delay that I must beg you to grant me in settling our accounts. You know my regular habits of business, and will easily believe that the balance-sheet between us is made out with the greatest possible accuracy. All this, which of course, between you and I, Arthur, is the most essential part of our settling, is already done. All I ask is a little indulgence about paying the balance. However, if this is in the least way inconvenient to you, I must of course alter my intention about poor Clara.”

“It will not in the slightest degree be inconvenient to me,” replied Dalrymple eagerly, but without adding another word.

Sir George, however, was perfectly satisfied, and changed the

conversation by saying, "Do you know, Dalrymple, that I am ordered to go abroad by my physicians on account of the state of my lungs? I cannot get rid of my devilish cough."

"No, indeed, Sir George, I had not heard of it. I had understood you to say that you were quite recovered. I hope it will prove a false alarm, and that if you go, it will be merely for your pleasure."

"I suppose that I hope so too, Dalrymple. We all go on hoping, you know, to the very last. But at any rate I do not think it right to refuse obedience, and I intend, if possible, to get off by the end of next week. Mrs. Longuéville and Clara of course go with me, and we want to let the house in Bruton-street. I wish you could find me a tenant, Arthur."

"I believe I shall want to find a tenant for my own house," replied Mr. Dalrymple, with a languid smile.

"You persevere, then, in your fancy of visiting the Cossacks? Perhaps you are right to see all you can before you settle down into a married man and a senator; and as we are not to be in England for some time to come, I shall not mind you going so much. Russia still sounds like a distant country; but upon my soul, in these days it signifies devilish little whether one sets off to hunt at Melton, philosophise at Niagara, or go to a *soirée* at the drawing-room of the Emperor of all the Russias. But you must go through Paris, Dalrymple: one reason why that dear little capital is so adorable is, that it is on the high road to every other. You must promise to come and see us there."

"My movements are still very uncertain, Sir George; when I shall leave England, or whether I shall leave it at all this year, is still dependent on circumstances. I have really decided nothing."

"Well, God bless you, my dear fellow, be you where you will! But at any rate you must give us as much of your time as you can while we remain here. Will you come and share our family dinner to-day? You must not refuse me, Dalrymple, upon my word you must not."

There was something more than decision in the tone with which Mr. Dalrymple declined this invitation. The accent seemed to say, not only that he did not mean to accept it, but that he felt there was something almost monstrous in the proposition.

Sir George perceived, to use his own phrase, that there was a screw loose somewhere; but at that moment he was in too high spirits, and too well satisfied with the manner in which he had managed his own affairs, to be capable of feeling any very grave concern about any thing else, and he took his departure, gaily whistling an air from Don Juan.

When he had left the room, Dalrymple rose up and locked the door of it. His soul was in a state of tumult which he could not have borne that any human eye should witness. He had struggled hard to tear the image of Clara from his imagination and his heart; and though he was too deeply conscious that he had not succeeded to permit any self-delusion to beguile him into the belief that he was either indifferent or happy, he had still flattered himself that time was doing its silent work with him, and that the day might come when he should look back to the feelings which still tortured him with a mixture of satisfaction and self-approval, from remembering that he had not listened to passion instead of judgment, and had abstained from endeavouring to win as his wife a woman who had so often made him feel that she did not love him. But the statement he had just received from her father not only proved, beyond the possibility of doubt, her mad attachment to one so every way her inferior, but also showed such a daring contempt of the ordinary decorum of youthful womanhood as must startle and disgust the least fastidious. The pang produced by this was terrible. His early history was one that had taught him to cling with almost superstitious reverence to everything that marked the dignified refinement of the better class of his countrywomen; and to find that the only one among them he had ever conceived it possible to love should have thus acted, seemed to turn every hope in life into a blank.

The first half-hour passed in these gloomy meditations was one of unmingled suffering; but in the next a cheering hope arose that the statement might have been false, or at least not altogether true. His opinion of Sir George, though by no means so bad as he deserved, was such as to make him think it very possible he might falsify and disfigure facts, in order to excuse his want of punctuality in the settlement of his accounts. The idea, once conceived, gained ground every moment: to endure an hour of unnecessary doubt upon such a subject was impossible; and unlocking his door, he hurried to his stables, himself assisted, to the utter astonishment of his groom, in saddling his horse, and, declining the servant's attendance, mounted without losing a moment, and set off at a brisk trot for the house of Mr. Barton, who was not only his broker, but an old and esteemed acquaintance.

He feared that some skill would be necessary in leading the old gentleman to speak on the subject on which he intended to cross-examine him; but, perfectly resolved not to leave himself unsatisfied as to the truth or falsehood of this hateful story, he determined, if all other means failed, to let the old man so far into

his confidence as to make him feel that the information he sought was very important to him; and this he felt sure would be sufficient to render him communicative. It was evident, from the cordiality with which Mr. Barton received him, that Dalrymple had not over-estimated the worthy broker's regard.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, my dear Mr. Arthur," he exclaimed, "and it would have grieved me sorely if I had been out of the way when it fell upon me; and that I should have been, as sure as fate, but for an accident that sent me home an hour before my usual time. I wonder, now, if I could coax you to dine with an old bachelor? I would give you as fine a bottle of claret as ever you drank in your life. What say you to it?"

Had Dalrymple chosen to answer honestly, he would have said that he was quite ready to dine with him, provided he should give to his questions such an answer as he desired to hear; but that he could not venture to make the engagement unconditionally, because, if the answer were other than he wished, he should be no fit company for any man. Not exactly wishing to be thus frank, however, he thought the safer course was to decline the invitation, which he did with the assurance that he had by no means forgotten a very agreeable impromptu dinner of the same kind which he had enjoyed with him on his return from Belgium; adding, "We have never talked over old times together since that day, but I shall never forget all your friendly good-nature to me when I was greatly in want of it."

"If I had my will we should never be so long without meeting, I promise you, Mr. Arthur. And, by the way, you are just in good time to indulge me with a little gossip about an old friend of yours, and mine too. Do tell me, Mr. Arthur, if it is really the case that Miss Meddows, such a lovely noble-looking creature as she is, means to give herself to a young fellow that I don't know much about, to be sure, but that I can't find out is in any way to be a fitting match for her?"

Here was the desired subject opened for him with sufficient explicitness, but how to go on with it he knew not. Already he began to feel his hopes and his courage fail, and, perhaps, had the choice been left him, he would rather have escaped with the remnant of doubt that remained, than stay to endure the torture of having it removed. But such an escape was impossible; and, nerving himself to the task, he answered, with tolerable steadiness,

"I guess what you mean, Mr. Barton. But I did not know that any thing had occurred sufficiently decisive for it to be likely to reach you. How did you come to hear of this?"

"Why, the manner of it was queer enough, to be sure, and as

we are all old acquaintances together, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't mention the circumstance to you, especially as the young lady never breathed a word about wishing to keep it secret. But you'll agree with me, I think, that the case is pretty clear, when I tell you that the lovely Clara came to me the other day for the purpose of making a transfer of four thousand pounds from her name into that of Mr. Charles Chesterfield. There cannot be two ways of explaining that case there.—God bless my soul! you are not well, Mr. Arthur! What's the matter with you, my dear sir? Not taken ill, I hope, are you? I don't think I ever saw a man turn so pale in my life."

"It is nothing, sir—a slight spasm that I am sometimes subject to—but it is over," replied the miserable young man, struggling hard to master feelings of which he was heartily ashamed.

"Come, come, that's well—your colour is coming again now, but, upon my life, you frightened me; and though I don't want to frighten you in return, I can't but say that I think you ought to have a medical opinion about such spasms as these, Mr. Dalrymple; I do indeed. Promise me now, that you will be a reasonable man, and just mention it to somebody. And whenever you do take advice, be sure to tell the doctor that when it comes on you turn as white as a corpse. I am quite sure that's an important symptom."

"I thank you, dear sir, for your kind interest about me; but I must get into the air now; that is the best remedy. God bless you, sir—farewell."

"Dear me! And so you must run away, must you, just as we were beginning to have a little chat. Well, well, I would not keep you for the world, if you think the air will do you good. But you'll take advice, Mr. Arthur, you'll promise me that?"

* * * * *

While this scene was going on in Gower-street, Sir George Meddows was enjoying the anticipation of an evening spent at his favourite club, with greater freedom from the consciousness that he could not pay a bet if he lost it than he had felt for some time. Though the light was waning, he determined to take one turn up and down St. James's-street, for in truth his spirits were in too volatile a state to make him relish the idea of sitting in his dull library for an hour or two before dressing-time.

As he once more crossed Piccadilly, for the purpose of reaching his favourite region, he perceived two gentlemen on the point of turning down St. James's-street before him. One of these he immediately recognized as the honourable Mr. Osterly, an old acquaintance, and one of high influence in the set which constituted the only portion of the earth's millions which Sir George

considered as fitting to be styled "THE WORLD." He hastened his steps to overtake him, and just as he was half across the street, Mr. Osterly turned his head in such a manner as to render it apparently impossible that he should not see and know him. Sir George raised his hand to hail him, but at the same moment Mr. Osterly twisted himself and the friend who hung on his arm round the corner of St. James's-street, and began walking away at a rapid pace along Piccadilly.

For a moment the gay baronet was startled, and half muttered an oath, followed by the words "a cut;" but in the next, he remembered how dark it was getting, and how very near-sighted almost every body of any fashion was growing; and then he thought again of his four thousand pounds, ready money, and of the style in which he meant to enjoy himself at the club, and so he whiled away the time as he intended, till he returned to dress for dinner; after which ceremony carefully performed, he entered the library, now serving as a drawing-room, and astonished, at least as much as he delighted, his sister and daughter, by the exuberant gaiety of his spirits.

Whenever and however Mrs. Longuéville and Sir George Meddows found themselves, there also might be found a pack of cards. With the pouring out of the coffee came, as usual, the words—"Shall we play a game of *écarté*, Amelia?" The brother and sister were thus employed, and Clara, as usual, was sitting at another table with a book, when the sound of a visitor's knock at the door almost startled them; for their return had not been announced, and they expected no one.

"It must be Arthur Dalrymple," said Sir George. No one answered him, but Mrs. Longuéville looked at Clara, while at the same moment the volume with which the young lady was occupied was so raised as to make this look of none effect. The visitor, however, was not Arthur Dalrymple. The door of the room being thrown open, the servant announced "Colonel Tibold," a name unknown, or nearly so, to both the ladies, but sufficiently familiar to Sir George to cause his rising up, and coming forward with an extended hand to meet the person who bore it.

This courteous action, however, if seen, was not responded to; for the colonel stopped short at the distance of two paces from the *écarté* table, and said—"Sir George Meddows, may I have the honour of speaking a few words to you alone?"

The baronet immediately rose, and however sinister might have been the thoughts which this visit, and the manner of it, suggested, he betrayed no symptom of either surprise or annoyance. With a sort of stately courtesy, he requested Colonel Tibold to be seated while lights were placed in another room.

He rang the bell as he spoke, and ordered the servant, who immediately answered it, to let him know when the dining-room should be ready. The interval before the man returned, though a short one, appeared very disagreeably long to all the party. The ladies, of course, were profoundly silent; and when Sir George asked the colonel if he would choose to take tea, the answer, "I thank you, sir, no," was pronounced in a tone that very effectually prevented any further attempts at conversation on the part of the master of the house.

At length the servant reappeared; Sir George immediately rose, Colonel Tibold followed the example, and the next moment they were shut up *tête-à-tête* in the dining-room.

"Now sir," said Sir George, without seating himself, "let me request to know your pleasure."

"You will not be greatly surprised, I presume, Sir George Meddows, when I inform you that I come upon a mission from my friend Mr. Oglevy," replied the Colonel. "Will you do me the honour, sir, of informing me whether your extraordinary visit to him this morning was intended as a jest? If so, it was a rude one, sir, to say the least of it, and Mr. Oglevy hopes, through me, to receive not only explanation, but apology."

As this speech was delivered with very deliberate slowness, it occupied sufficient time to allow Sir George all the meditation necessary for his reply. The interval was quite long enough to enable him to remember clearly the nervous temperament of the diminutive individual from whom this high-sounding embassy was sent; and, promptly deciding not to abandon the bold project he had formed upon his knowledge of it, he replied, with a steady calmness which permitted no feeling save a little disdain to appear,

"I am not greatly surprised, Colonel Tibold, that the unfortunate gentleman, whom you call your friend, should prefer apology to explanation; neither will you be surprised, my good sir, when you have been put in possession of the truth, that I should prefer explanation to apology. The first, Colonel Tibold, I am perfectly ready to give; for the second, I am truly sorry to say there is not the shadow of a reason. Rather, infinitely rather, believe me, would I make the humblest apology ever uttered by a gentleman, than retain the painful and degrading impression of having made myself the companion of a man who could act as Mr. Oglevy has done. There is but one point of my own conduct which I can consider as in the least degree open to blame. I am afraid I ought, in the first instance, to have denounced the unfair play of which I accuse Mr. Oglevy to the gentlemen of the club, and in fact, to the public; but a feeling of profound pity prevented

my doing this. When we rose from the gaming-table, at which we had sat perfectly alone, and where I only remained long enough, after my suspicions were awakened, to convince myself beyond the possibility of doubt that they were just, when we rose from that table I said enough to make the wretched man perfectly understand that he was discovered. As well as I can recollect, my words were—‘ Mr. Oglevy, let us never meet again. I am willing to sink the business of this night in eternal oblivion—but remember, that should I ever hear a whisper of any thing similar, my promise of secrecy will be cancelled, and every particular of this nefarious attempt made public.’ Were it possible, Colonel Tibold, that *my* words could in the opinion of any man want confirmation, it might certainly be found in the fact that the wretched man crept off, without hinting at the payment of his nefarious winnings. Guess, then, my indignation and surprise on receiving this letter from him at Brighton, two days ago.”

Sir George drew forth his pocket-book, and took thence a letter which he read aloud, as follows :

“ SIR,—I am sorry to be obliged to remind you of my claim upon you for three thousand eight hundred pounds, won by me at *piquet*, the last time I had the honour of meeting you at the club. I flatter myself you will consider the length of time which I have suffered to elapse without reminding you of this debt a proof that I have been unwilling to press the claim till driven to do so by your having apparently forgotten it.

“ I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

“ WILLIAM HENRY OGLEVY.”

“ Of course there was but one thing to be done, Colonel Tibold,” continued Sir George, as he replaced the document in his pocket-book. “ I immediately set off for town, and should have done so, I believe, had I been wandering in the vale of Cashmere, instead of on the Marine Parade, at Brighton. I went with all speed to the dwelling of this audacious man, and after placing before him, in sufficiently forcible language, I believe, the enormity of his conduct, left him with the assurance that if he ever dared, directly or indirectly, to hint at such a claim again, I would expose him throughout the world. This, sir, is the *explanation* of the affair between this wretched Mr. Oglevy and myself ; and now, Colonel Tibold, tell me, as a gentleman and a man of honour, what sort of formula, approaching an apology, is due from me ?” Here Sir George ceased, looking up into the face of the gentleman opposite to him with an appearance of ingenuous frankness that he was conscious did him honour.

Colonel Tibold was evidently staggered by this “ plain unvar-

nished tale," but, after remaining silent for a minute or two, he said, "I am sorry to say, Sir George, that it is but too evident that there has been most atrocious conduct somewhere; and of course, on your part, it must be a matter of great regret that you have so long kept this affair secret. But I see not how, conformably to the duty which I have accepted of negotiator, I can avoid proceeding with my mission, and informing you that unless you immediately pay the sum demanded, with an acknowledgment that your late refusal to do so was uttered jestingly, Mr. Oglevy desires you will meet him at day-break to-morrow morning on a spot near the Gravel-pits, which I will have the honour of pointing out to any gentleman who shall agree to attend you. Mr. Oglevy will take a brace of pistols with him; if it pleases you to do the same, you may take your choice between them on the ground."

"To such an invitation as this, Colonel Tibold, I never return but one answer, which is that I most willingly accept it—that I will immediately request the attendance of a friend, and take care to be punctually on the ground at the time appointed."

"I shall not fail to report this reply, as frankly as it is given, Sir George," said the hostile ambassador, rising to take his leave.

"I should be wrong to detain you longer, as you will have to seek a friend to attend you. When you have made the selection, have the kindness to give the gentleman this card. I shall, after seeing Mr. Oglevy, remain at home for the purpose of receiving him, and settling with him whatever remains to be arranged."

The two gentlemen then bowed very profoundly to each other and parted.

For a few minutes after he found himself alone, Sir George Meddows remained standing before the waning fire of the dining-room, his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the pale cinders.

"Is it possible the rat-like little animal can be in earnest?" he murmured. "Is it possible he will pluck up manhood enough to meet me? I doubt it much. But for this I care not a straw. The devil himself must take part against me, which I do not greatly fear, or my hand will be somewhat the steadier of the two. If he does not bolt, it must be a chance, little short of a miracle, that saves his life. It will be no bad thing to secure his secrecy for ever."

Having no mind to be questioned concerning the business which had brought Colonel Tibold to call upon him, Sir George did not re-enter the library, but, ringing for his servant, desired him to tell the ladies that he was gone out, and should probably not be at home till late.

"To the club again, I doubt not," said Mrs. Longuéville, after the servant had removed the tea-tray, and closed the door.

Clara expressively shook her head in token of the same suspicion, but said nothing.

"I wonder what that man came stalking in here for! He treated us very much as if we had been a couple of maid-servants. Did you ever hear of him before?" said Mrs. Longuéville.

"I have heard the name," replied Clara, "but never saw him till this evening, that I remember. It seemed to me that he was almost a stranger to my father also. Did it not appear so?"

"Evidently," rejoined Mrs. Longuéville. "I should not be greatly surprised to hear that he came with a message from some quarrelling member of Crockford's to invite Sir George to be his second in an exchange of shots. But it will be excessively silly of him if he goes out with any of them. It often turns out a monstrous bore, now that people have taken it into their heads to make such a fuss about it."

"I trust that you are altogether wrong as to the nature of his errand," returned Clara, gravely.

"Very likely, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Longuéville, with a yawn. "How dreadfully dull it is, evening after evening, in this gloomy library, isn't it? I am positively sick with longing for the sight of Paris, and cannot conceive how I ever could mistake my own tastes and inclinations so completely as to leave it. My brother shall never make such a fool of me again, he may depend upon that. Nothing would ever have induced me to come to England, but the belief that he would be able to keep up a thoroughly good style of living, and I don't call it so at all—quite the contrary, being in London in the very midst of the season almost, and never seeing a christian soul, or getting a single rubber. It is no comfort to me to be told that he cannot help it, and that he has been living too fast already. All that is nothing at all to me, you know. Of course I'm very sorry for it, and all that, but the plain truth is, that I might have been living on at Paris without ever missing my card-table for a single evening, and with the pleasure of being constantly surrounded with friends."

"Let us rejoice that your return to Paris is so near," replied Clara. "It is more profitable to fix your thoughts on the future which you do like, than on the present which you do not. I suppose you will be in Paris before this day week!"

"You are quite right there, my dear. Two days more! and then, thank Heaven! we shall be *en route*. It is no good to ask you to play cards, for I know by experience that you would not know for two minutes together what you were about. It is almost ten o'clock, Clara; I think I will go to my own room, and just see that every thing is in progress for being ready."

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It will easily be supposed that it was not the custom in the Meddows family for the ladies to take any particular note of the exits and entrances of the master of it. At what hour Sir George returned home on the night of Colonel Tibold's visit, they were wholly ignorant; nor were they at all aware that above an hour before their shutters were opened, or their curtains withdrawn on the following morning, he had gone out again.

Clara was ever at the breakfast-table before her aunt or father; and on this day was beguiling the usual period of waiting by the perusal of the newspaper. Suddenly her attention was withdrawn from it by hearing a loud unmeasured knocking at the door, not followed, but accompanied by incessant ringing. So much was this clamour out of the common way, and so strange were the sounds which succeeded the opening of the house door, that she was irresistibly impelled to look forth into the hall in order to discover what it all might be.

It was a dreadful and appalling sight that met her eyes. As she opened the library door she beheld the body of her father borne in the arms of two men across the hall. His dress was profusely stained with blood, his face the colour of a corpse, and his features contracted into that indescribable expression which, trumpet-tongued in its grim silence, announces approaching death. Two gentlemen followed, both of whom were perfect strangers to her. One of these exclaimed, in a voice of professional authority,

"Let him be taken to some room where there is a sofa. I must attempt the extraction of the ball; but I cannot venture upon his being taken up stairs."

Clara, though horror-struck, lost no portion of her aching senses as she listened to these words; she heard them all distinctly, and they explained the fatal history at once. Her father had fought a duel, and had fallen.

It was to the library that the still bleeding body was borne, and in the shortest possible time the bewildered but still efficient Clara had a bed arranged there, on which the dying man was laid. Then, and not till then, she left the room, while the surgeon who attended him home, and another whom she had instantly summoned, attempted the only means by which there was a possibility of saving life. Poor Clara! While this fearful experiment was making, she felt, as she stood trembling to learn the result, that she was alone in the world. Nothing could give stronger proof of the total want of all real sympathy between herself and her aunt, than the fact that she never even thought of going to her during this dreadful interval, but, stationed at

the open door of the dining-room, waited the result unsupported by the presence of any human being.

Sir George did not die under the operation; he continued to breathe for an hour or two, but never spoke more; and before noon the two surgeons, the attendant friend, and all those who deemed themselves privileged to enter the house with inquiries, had disappeared, leaving the daughter and the sister of the slaughtered man in awful repose to meditate on the tremendous event that had fallen upon them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Showing that, in some cases, it is not wise to be better than our Neighbours.

It would be difficult to conceive a situation much more wretched than that of Clara, when, the first stunning horror of this fearful catastrophe being over, her mind recovered its tone sufficiently to enable her to turn her thoughts upon herself and her own position. It is true that the agony of bereaved affection did not make any part of her suffering; it was impossible for her to have known her father, as she did know him, and retain any strong feeling of affection for him. But though this particular species of agony was spared her, she could hardly be said to be the less miserable for it. There was something even in the absence of this natural sorrow, that was in itself terrible. She felt that it would have been a blessing to her, could she have wept the gentle tears of affection. Rarely has one so capable of loving and being loved felt themselves so utterly friendless as poor Clara. So untoward had been her destiny, that her very virtues had actually been in a great degree the cause of this; for never, with the sole exception of Mr. Dalrymple, had she been thrown into near and intimate intercourse with any one capable of awakening the latent warmth of her noble heart. Poor Clara! She was not formed to love on like the mere well-dressed pretty-mannered worldlings, who were the only intimates of her aunt; and now, in sorrow, in poverty, and distress, she knew not a single human being to whom she could turn with affection and trust, and say, "comfort, and help me!" There was one, indeed, and one only, to whom her pure proud spirit could have bowed with reverence and love, but he shunned her.

The waking on the morning following any terrible event is very dreadful. Mrs. Longuéville and her niece met at their gloomy breakfast with mutual glances that seemed to say—

"Look I as pale as you?"

Not even the hard crust of selfishness, which seemed at all times to surround Mrs. Longuéville like a shell, impenetrable as that of

the tortoise, could prevent her feeling a creeping horror at the manner of her brother's death. Perhaps, too, with all her worldly indurated callousness, she had felt something nearer to affection for the wretched man who lay dead within a few feet of her, than it was possible for his daughter to have done. They had been brought up together—their miserable paltry tastes and enjoyments were the same—their ambition had been bounded by the same glittering narrow circle; and what had been enjoyment to the one, had been enjoyment to the other also. Mrs. Longuéville, therefore, was as greatly shocked and shaken by the event as it was possible she could be by any thing that did not threaten her own life, limb, income, or station in society. She looked old, ill, and gloomy; seemed disposed to moralize rather sentimentally (for her), and hinted that it was a misfortune to have too affectionate a temper, and a heart too easily wrung by the misfortunes of others.

Clara looked as if the young blood were frozen in her veins; she seemed to speak with difficulty, and heard but little of the half-fretful, half-feeling, lamentations of her aunt. That her very soul was shaken by the horrible event was greatly proved by her seeming to prefer remaining with Mrs. Longuéville, to retiring according to her invariable custom to her own sitting-room. Poor Clara had, for many reasons, been obliged to form for herself an existence which had almost made a hermit of her in the midst of London, and while appearing as the nominal mistress of a mansion there, which its master desired beyond all things else should be accounted gay. In doing this, her manner had been always gentle and quiet, but nevertheless so steadfast in the unvarying regularity with which she withdrew herself to her own occupations, that her aunt had long ceased to harass her with observations or reproaches on her solitary and unsocial habits. It seemed now as if she expected as usual to see Clara retire from the breakfast-room; and when she perceived that, instead of doing so, she drew her chair near the fire, and sat sadly and silently gazing on it, she said,—“Well, thank God, my dear, that you are not going to shut yourself up again in your usual way. I must say, to be sure, that it would be both wicked and cruel if you did, and I in such a dreadful state, both in mind and body, as I am; and indeed, and indeed, Clara, we have enough to talk about, haven't we? I take it for granted, my dear, that you will now be aware that the best thing you can do will be to go back to Paris with me. We must put our incomes together, you know, and manage as cleverly as we can to make the best of it; and you ought to thank God, my poor girl, that you have got somebody belonging to you who does know how to manage your affairs.”

Though in no very favourable state of mind for encountering the reproaches which she knew would follow the disclosure, Clara felt it to be absolutely necessary that she should no longer delay informing her aunt of her having reduced her five thousand to one; and she accordingly stated the fact, exactly as it had occurred, well aware that she should do no injury to her father's memory in the estimation of his sister, by openly stating the transaction between him and Charles Chesterfield. Mrs. Longuéville's indignation on hearing this probably did her good, as it appeared immediately to restore the vigour and animation she had lost, and to give her once more the power of scolding heartily."

"Clara Meddows! it is impossible!" she exclaimed. "I will not believe you have been so utterly and entirely distracted! You cannot have done this mad act! Tell me, tell me at once, that you have only thought of it—that you have fancied it might be doing something very noble and fine, and all that sort of stuff, but, in the name of Heaven, do not tell me that you have really done it, for, upon my word and honour, I believe that another moment's doubt upon the subject would really drive me mad."

"Dismiss all doubt on the point from your mind then, dear aunt," Clara replied. "The thing is done, and I do assure you that I cannot regret it. Would it not have been too dreadful to have sent this poor lad down to the place where our ancestors have been born and buried for so many generations in honour and in reverence, with such a tale to tell? Robbed, fleeced, cheated out of the little fortune, the acquirement of which had caused such a jubilee among his friends, and that by Sir George Meddows himself. Aunt Longuéville, I could not have borne it; and the only comfort I have at this terrible moment is from knowing that I have saved my unhappy father's name from the hateful disgrace which this frightful history would have heaped upon it."

"Madness! Perfect madness!" reiterated Mrs. Longuéville, "and as ineffectual as mad. And how, I pray you, most magnanimous young lady, do you intend to pay Mr. Chesterfield, senior, the thousand pounds with three years' interest, which unluckily happens to be due to him? And what is your *projet de finance*, if you please, relative to the liquidation of about a dozen other claims, all equally pressing, which I happen to know exist against the ghost of what was your poor father's estate? You know as well as I do, Miss Meddows, that from the hour my poor dear brother ceased to breathe, every acre of the Meddows' property became his nephew's—wretch that he is! saint, miser, and radical. I should like to know how much you expect he will contribute towards the liquidation of his uncle's debts? You know that we have all been at drawn daggers for

years, and have no more right to expect he will contribute a shilling towards your maintenance than that he will nobly pay all the claims upon his too liberal-minded predecessor. How then, in the name of Heaven, are you to exist, now that you have madly stripped yourself of your only resource?"

"As I can, aunt; but certainly not by asking the charity of my cousin," replied Clara. "But oh! how you grieve me by what you say of other debts. I guessed and feared that there might be many claims from tradesmen; but I have often hoped, before this horrible catastrophe, that my poor father might be induced to dispose of all his personal property during his lifetime for the purpose of paying every body. And this, aunt Longuéville, is what must be done now. This, if I have any power, is what shall be done."

"You know not what you are talking about, child," replied Mrs. Longuéville, scornfully; "and it would have been well if before you took upon yourself to arrange affairs of which you are profoundly ignorant, you had asked counsel of those who were somewhat better informed. The mad deed you have done will have no more effect in clearing your father's memory from the disgrace, if you choose to call it so, of having died in debt, than a drop of water in augmenting the ocean. The only excuse for your father, Clara, is, that he was a man of fashion; and, happily for the higher classes of society, this is an excuse which is never pleaded in vain to those whose opinions are of the most consequence. It is in this, foolish girl, that both you and I too must seek our consolation, and not in mad Quixotic efforts to pay what it is utterly impossible ever should be paid."

"Oh! do not say so, aunt," cried Clara, beseechingly; "do not say so to punish me for what you think an imprudent act. If I have rendered myself destitute, let me enjoy the only possible consolation left me. Let me believe that I have saved him, and you, and myself, from infamy!"

"What nonsense it is, Clara Meddows, to talk to me exactly as if I had the power of helping it, or of settling things one way or another, according to my own will and pleasure," replied her aunt, petulantly. "It is really being *too* childish! I tell you, once for all, that your father, was in every sense of the word a man of fashion, and as such it is your duty to consider him. I own I wish that tradesmen's bills were only the worst of it. These are trumpery claims that I do not believe any people of real distinction ever do care very seriously about. But I wish he had not borrowed money of so many people of his own rank and station, because it is so likely that one may chance to meet them oftener than may be agreeable. The best remedy for that,

however, is to go abroad directly—and this is what I shall certainly do, with as little delay as possible. But what is to become of you, child, Heaven only knows! I hope and trust you do not rest your dependence on me; for I give you my word of honour that it will be quite as much as I shall be able to do to support myself. Had you still your little income to join to mine, I would have done my very best to make a decent figure for you. But now I have no power whatever to help you, Clara Meddows; and I must say, that you do not deserve I should give myself any further concern about your destiny, let it be what it may.”

“I will never trouble you about my own concerns,” said Clara, firmly, “if you will only put me in the way of knowing what debts there are, without making enquiries that might lead to disappointment in the event that they unhappily should exceed the means of payment. There *must* be property, aunt Longuéville, which, if sold, would go far in the way of payment. If we cannot pay the whole, let whatever is left be divided fairly and honestly amongst all who have claims, and for God’s sake let the trades-people be the first paid!”

“For shame, Clara Meddows!” interrupted Mrs. Longuéville, indignantly. “Is that speaking like a person of common sense, and a gentlewoman? You actually make me tremble as I listen to you. I do believe in my heart, that if you had your way, you would like to advertise a dividend of so many shillings in the pound to all who had any claim upon the estate of the late Sir George Meddows, deceased! Clara! Clara! before you entertain notions so detestably romantic, vulgar, and absurd, you should set yourself to think a little of what you owe to the honour of a respectable family. In my estimation it is a crime, yes, and a hateful crime, too, wantonly to disgrace a name which, however it may have been linked with acts of gay and fashionable imprudence, has never, thank Heaven! been stamped with vulgarity. But you are too obstinate and self-willed for me to have any control over you: all I can hope for now is to sustain my own character, and that, I fear, can only be done by separating myself from you entirely. This is a painful necessity, of course, but it is clear that I must make up my mind to it.”

“It may, indeed, be necessary that we should separate, dear aunt; I greatly fear it is so,” replied Clara, gently: “but this should only make us endeavour to render the last days we may ever pass together as mutually consolatory as possible. It shall be my study to do so, if you will only grant me all the information you possess respecting my poor father’s personal property and the claims existing against him. I suppose the furniture both of this house and the Grange has nothing to do with the

entail? There is a great deal of plate, too, and that of itself will go far, I trust, towards——”

“Upon my word, my dear, it is quite pitiable to hear you,” said Mrs. Longuéville, interrupting her. “You seem to fancy yourself quite a woman of business, and you know no more what you are talking about than a baby. I am sure I hate to talk about the things, because the real truth is, that no good whatever can be done by it. They must arrange themselves, as the French say, and we should be much better employed by sending for the dress-maker, and settling about our mourning.”

“Why is it foolish and childish to talk about selling my father’s plate, aunt?” persisted Clara. “Surely you would not wish it to be kept while his debts are unpaid?”

“Kept, indeed?” cried Mrs. Longuéville, impatiently. “What nonsense you do talk, Clara! As if your poor dear father, so frequently unlucky as he was at play, could have gone on keeping all that quantity of plate. I hate to talk to you at all about it, you are so exceedingly childish and silly; but if you will have the whole truth, do be quiet about the plate, child; he changed all his silver for plated goods long and long ago, and so you might have guessed, if you had had a slight mixture of common sense in your composition.”

Clara looked aghast, but received this most unexpected information in perfect silence.

“Upon my word, Clara, I see no reason why you should look so planet-struck at hearing this. I believe you would find, if you thought proper to inquire, that the world would vote your manœuvre about Mr. Charles Chesterfield a vast deal more blameable than your father’s changing his silver for plated goods; and, moreover, you might chance to discover that a good many of his friends and acquaintance had done the same.”

“Pray do not mistake me, ma’am!” said Clara, eagerly. “I dream not of blaming him for this—on the contrary, I think he was perfectly right. No conversion of property for the purpose of paying one’s debts, can in my opinion be wrong. If I looked planet-struck, as you call it, it was only because it made me feel that our means of paying were less than I had hoped for.”

“I wish to Heaven, Clara,” replied Mrs. Longuéville, fretfully, “that you would leave alone the debts, with which you have nothing on earth to do, and which really cannot signify a single straw, whether they are a little more or a little less. It is perfectly provoking to hear you going on ding-dong, ding-dong, about a parcel of people that we don’t care a farthing for, without even saying a single word as to how you intend to get out of the penniless state you have got into. Pray tell me,

if you can, what it is that in your wisdom you intend to do with yourself."

"My dear aunt," said Clara, with sudden animation,—“Don't you think that the four thousand he borrowed from Charles Chesterfield must have been still in his possession? Alas! he had no time to dispose of it!”

“You don't mean it? You don't mean that he got the money so recently as to make it improbable that he should have parted with it?” returned Mrs. Longuéville, quickly. “Heaven grant you may be right, Clara. In that case you will indeed be more lucky than you deserve, and be able to pay yourself again the sum which you so absurdly parted with. If this should prove to be the case, dear Clara, we may again set our horses together, and look forward to something like comfort. A very small apartment would do for us, you know, that is, as to the bed-rooms. I should not at all mind having only one between us, provided our *salon* was *comme il faut*; I have always been accustomed to make a respectable appearance, and I own that I think I owe it to myself to use every possible endeavour not to lose *caste* in the eyes of the world. And I can say just the same about our dinners, Clara; girls of your age never do care much about what they eat, you know, and I myself, so that I have just a nice little thing or two that I like, shall not in the least mind running things as close as possible about our table; and that, I feel sure, will enable us to keep a smart-looking footman, which, I must own, I think, in justice to myself, I ought never to be without. In short, my dear, if you do but find this four thousand pounds in his poor dear pocket-book, I shall consider our troubles as over. I am sure the thought seems quite like inspiration.”

Clara would gladly have avoided disturbing this happy state of mind, but she had a notion that she owed something to herself as well as her aunt, and, determined to leave no delusion that it was in her power to dispel, she said,

“My dearest aunt! it is very, very uncertain whether this money was remaining in my poor father's hands or not; but, if it was, do not believe that I shall consider myself as having any right to it. Oh, no!—the tradesmen, and——O, gracious Heaven!” she added, while a terrible recollection came across her—“Mr. Dalrymple, too! O, aunt Longuéville! would you not rather see me labouring for my bread than let him remain unpaid? Oh! think what judgment such a mind as his must form of us!”

“Clara, you are enough to drive one wild! Dalrymple, of all people in the world! Rolling in wealth as he is, and always appearing not to know how to spend his money,—you would actually be mad enough to think of paying him instead of your—

self! Let us talk no more about it, for goodness' sake. Upon second thoughts, it appears to me very improbable that this money should still be unappropriated. Poor George never got money in as fast as he paid it out, so I recommend you to think no more of the existence of a sum which he would hardly have borrowed in the way he did had he not been terribly pressed for it. No, no! there is no probability in it whatever."

"That is very true," replied Clara, with a very innocent air of conviction; "and surely it was much better that such claims should have been paid by himself than by us. And as for me, dear aunt, as it is most clearly evident that my own exertions must supply my wants, it is far better that I should tell you at once what I have decided upon, in order that you may not be harassed by any further discussion on the subject. My education has fortunately been such as to permit me to hope that I may find a maintenance by giving lessons. I will not venture to engage myself as a governess, because I think my habits both of thought and action have been too independent to render me eligible for such a situation; but I may give lessons, and this it is my purpose to do—not in London, indeed, but in some populous country town."

"Exactly like you! exactly like what any one might expect from your eccentric high-flying absurdity: and this, I presume, is what you call doing your duty to yourself and your family?"

"Will you tell me, aunt Longuéville, what line of conduct you would think, under my present circumstances, that it would be better for me to pursue?" demanded Clara.

"You find it very easy to ask advice; I wish there were any chance of your feeling it equally easy to follow it," replied her aunt, tartly; "in that case there might still be hope for you. There is no denying, spite of all your peculiarities of dress, and stiffness of manner, that you are well-looking; and if you would immediately do what I would have you, there might be still a chance of your getting married, notwithstanding the mad act you have committed, of which, by the by, there is no occasion to say any thing to any body. You have asked my advice, Clara Meddows, and I am willing to give it, though, to tell you the honest truth, I do not believe you have common sense enough in your composition to profit by it. What I would recommend is, that you should immediately write to every family with whom you have ever been at all intimately acquainted, informing them of the terrible catastrophe which has taken place, avoiding, of course, all allusion to that most vulgar of all subjects, pecuniary embarrassments; and hinting, with delicacy and tenderness, at the desolate feelings which follow upon such a loss. You may

mention also, that it is my intention to return immediately to Paris, and then add that you regret this, as you would a thousand times prefer remaining in dear England a little longer if you knew how to dispose of yourself. Take care to be affectionate and caressing in your language, and to every one you address say something kind and flattering about their dear happy home. If you will do this, and do it well, I have no doubt in the world but that you will get an invitation from somebody or other. Very likely you may get more than one, and in that case you must take care to make them dovetail in with advantage and convenience. I have known innumerable marriages grow out of this sort of system: every fresh domicile is a fresh chance; not to mention that the same dresses, with a little care and attention, may be passed off, over and over again, for new. And now tell me, Clara Meddows, if you have honesty enough to speak the truth, do you not think this scheme is a better one, and rather more lady-like and respectable, than trotting about the town to give lessons?"

Clara was silent, nor did she even venture to raise her eyes.

"You are determined, I think, to prevent my regretting the loss of your society," resumed Mrs. Longuéville, looking at her with great indignation. "So you won't speak? You won't confess that I am right? Or is it, my most talented Miss Clara, that you do really and truly believe your own beggarly project to be the best? I must say that in common civility you are bound to answer me, let the answer be what it may."

"But you will not think me either civil or wise, aunt Longuéville, if I differ from you. Believe me, it is very painful to me, on the eve of a separation that may be a very long one, to do or say any thing that may vex you; but, if you insist upon my speaking, I must say that, strange as it may appear to you, I do greatly prefer my own plan to yours."

"I cannot conceive how I could be such a fool," exclaimed Mrs. Longuéville, rising abruptly, and speaking with great vehemence. "I cannot guess how I could so utterly forget the thousand and one proofs you have heretofore given me of your obstinate self-will as to imagine for a moment that I should ever find you reasonable. It is great folly, too, Clara, to suppose that we shall either of us be the better for passing this miserable morning together. I shall immediately send for the dress-maker, and when I have done with her she shall come to you, unless, indeed, you should happen to take it into your head that it will be more proper and estimable to have no mourning at all."

With these words Mrs. Longuéville stalked out of the room, and Clara was left to meditate upon a past and a future, equally barren of satisfaction and of hope.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A successful Guess—Continued Difference of Opinion between the Aunt and Niece, which is at last satisfactorily settled by both Ladies following their own Inclinations.

MRS. LONGUÉVILLE had more reasons than one for thus hastily breaking up the *tête-à-tête* in which she had certainly intended to derive something like relief from the dismal thoughts to which the late event had given rise. In the first place, she was very heartily and sincerely disgusted with every thing that Clara had said, and with every thing she had proposed to do; so that now it was a new relief to get away from her. Secondly, she was really beginning to get anxious about her mourning; a business which, as she continually repeated to herself and her maid, was the most melancholy and heart-breaking in the world, but which was sure, nevertheless, of producing one good effect, namely, that of altogether turning her thoughts from the horrid images which filled them to the considerably less excruciating occupation furnished by experiments and consultations as to what forms and fabrics amidst the comprehensive livery of woe would best accord with her person.

Both these reasons for her retreat were good, strong, and sufficient; yet there was another behind more good, more strong, and more sufficient than either of them. When Clara mentioned the recent date of the transaction which had placed four thousand pounds sterling in her late father's hands, Mrs. Longuéville immediately conceived the hope that all, or at least a part of, this sum might still remain unappropriated, and, by enabling Clara to repay herself, put it again in her power to organise the plan of their living together at Paris, in the agreeable manner she had proposed. But the intention which her niece had so decidedly expressed of disposing otherwise of this money, should it indeed be found, entirely changed Mrs. Longuéville's view of the case, and made her feel that the discovery of such a treasure would be a torment rather than a consolation, were it to be thus wantonly appropriated.

This discouraging idea at first only acted upon her mind as a species of wet blanket, which she voluntarily applied to extinguish the hope she had conceived; for in her estimation it would have been greatly more vexatious to have found this money, and then have seen it so absurdly thrown away, than not to have found it at all; and so well regulated was her mind that the hope *was* extinguished, and she felt quite sure that the recovering such a sum from among the effects of her departed brother was an idea monstrous and improbable.

But as she sat scolding Clara for her various absurdities, by some accident or other the recollection of their last dinner with Sir George came into her head. She remembered the remarkably high spirits he was in, and it instantly struck her, as she afterwards thought, by inspiration, that this light-hearted joyousness could only have been occasioned by the consciousness of having money in his pocket. The logic of this reasoning was irresistible. "If he lost it not at the gaming-table that night, I shall find Master Charles Chesterfield's legacy in his pocket-book!" thought she; and then it was that, unable to endure the vexatious society of Clara any longer, she rose, and left the room in the manner above described.

Cautious as she was acute, however, her first act was to mount the stairs to her own apartment, and despatch her maid with orders to seek the dress-maker, and, if possible, to bring her back with her. But no sooner was this intelligent official fairly off the premises, than Mrs. Longuéville descended gently and mournfully to the fatal room where her unhappy brother had breathed his last. The body had been removed, and laid upon his own bed, and the usual order and appearance of the room restored; nevertheless she would have been better pleased had her important errand led her into any other room.

Mrs. Longuéville, however, was much too sensible a woman to suffer any idle feelings of the kind to interfere with an enterprise which she knew to be right and proper; and having taken an efficient dose of red lavender, she felt herself wonderfully sustained, and went through the whole business in a most resolute and exemplary manner. No one knew so well as herself the whereabouts of all her departed brother's repositories: no time was therefore lost in vain researches; but having applied the key of his writing-table (thoughtfully looked for, and secured, before he had breathed his last), she at once opened the drawer in which she knew his pocket-book was wont to lie, and where, according to her expectation, it lay still.

The interval which elapsed between its greeting her eyes and being clutched in her hand was not great; and the very first touch of it made her heart leap. It was full. The pocket-books of other men might have been discovered to be equally distended, without producing on the minds of their confidential relatives the same delightful sensation as that now experienced by Mrs. Longuéville; for in many cases this distinction might have been accounted for in another manner, some gentlemen being in the habit of occasionally putting an unpaid bill or two into that general receptacle. But not so Sir George Meddows. His regular and unvarying habits of business led him constantly to deposit

his unpaid bills in a very ample and commodious drawer which formed the capacious base of his writing-table. With this habit of his Mrs. Longuéville was perfectly familiar, and therefore hastily unclasped the precious pocket-book with the very firmest conviction that she should find it filled with bank-notes. Nor was she disappointed; a very rapid glance sufficed to show her that the sum she had hoped to find was there, and undiminished—but there was also a small scrap of paper besides; she recognised her brother's writing, and eagerly perused the following words—

“These notes, amounting to four thousand pounds, are the property of my daughter, Clara Meddows, being the sum she recently sold out of the funds, to answer a responsibility contracted by me to Charles Chesterfield. If I fall in the meeting I am about to keep with Mr. Oglevy, it is my will that she be immediately put in possession of this sum of four thousand pounds. I wish all other property to be disposed of for the payment of my just debts.

(Signed) “GEORGE MEDDOWS.”

and dated the morning of the day on which he fell. Mrs. Longuéville, to do her justice, had not come to this examination with any intention whatever of robbing her niece by appropriating what she might chance to find there. Her project was to save, if possible, any ready money that might be left from the engulfing whirlpool of debt into which her romantic niece seemed disposed to throw every thing she could find. Should enough be rescued in this manner to render the Paris scheme possible, she would have felt no scruple in concealing the fact till she had got Clara safely with her at Paris, beyond the reach of the claims which she well knew, if waited for, would not only strip her bare but break her heart beside, because it was utterly impossible she could satisfy them all. But it entered not into her calculations that she should find a will. She, too, had her habits of business as well as her departed brother; and though the testamentary document which she now held in her hand was not regularly witnessed, and so forth, she was quite aware that the suppression of it was a serious matter; and therefore, trusting to the solemn impression likely to be made on the mind of her niece by the last words of her father, she did but wait to give her own necessary orders to the expected dress-maker, and then presented herself at the door of Clara's sitting-room with an aspect vastly more gentle than when she had quitted her, and almost asked leave to come in, that she might speak to her upon a little business of importance.

“My dear Clara,” she began, “I have something to commu-

nicate which, at the same time it will cause you strong emotion, will likewise, as I trust, relieve your mind from much that must now most painfully weigh upon it. Will you listen to me calmly? And moreover, promise not to answer me too hastily."

"Most certainly I will," replied Clara, raising her eyes from the Bible which lay open before her, and fixing them on her aunt with a look that betokened both surprise and doubt.

"Well, then, my love, close your book, and hear me," said Mrs. Longuéville with solemnity. "There is no need, my poor child," she continued, "that you should open your heart and express your inmost feelings to me, in order that I should understand your present state of mind—I know it but too well, my poor Clara—I know that you are at this moment totally unfit to look after your own concerns, or to enter into any of the painful examinations which your present melancholy circumstances render necessary. Knowing all this, dear Clara, it is of course my duty, as most surely it is my wish, to exert myself to the very utmost in order to spare you, as much as possible, and at the same time to take care that nothing of importance should be neglected. With this view, my dear love, I have been examining the papers of your poor dear father, thinking it just possible that he might have left a will, and knowing that, before any thing was done, even in the matter of his funeral, it was our bounden duty to look for it. In this search, my dear girl, which, as you may well believe, it was exceedingly painful to me to make, I have succeeded beyond my hopes; for, not only have I found a will, Clara, but also the property for the disposal of which it was made. You were quite right, dear child, respecting the sum he had borrowed from Charles Chesterfield, and which you have made so tremendous a sacrifice to repay: whatever the object was for which my poor brother borrowed it, he felt, poor soul, that it was less important than providing in some degree for you. Here is his pocket-book, Clara. Here are notes to the amount of four thousand pounds, all untouched, and probably exactly as he received them from the young man; and wrapped round them was this paper. Read it, my dear girl, and you will perceive that, though he did not, perhaps, make so much fuss about his fatherly fondness as many others, there was no deficiency of that tender watchfulness which proves affection more than any caresses can do. Take the paper, Clara, read it, and, as in duty bound, take care to act in word and deed in conformity and obedience to the spirit of it."

Clara took the paper, and read it through the tears which very naturally flowed at finding that the thoughts of her unfortunate father had been occupied by her welfare during the last hours of

his existence; but she read it in silence, and having finished the perusal delivered it back into the hands of her aunt, and, resting her arms upon the table, lay her head down upon them, and wept.

For a minute or two, Mrs. Longuéville seemed to think this very right and proper, and even uttered one or two little appropriate expletives, such as “poor dear!”—“quite natural!” “no wonder!” and the like. But ere very many of such phrases could have found time to make themselves heard, her *habits of business* made her anxious to get over all that kind of thing, and to find out what sort of use Clara intended to make of her recovered property, having still some disagreeable doubts upon her mind on the subject.

“Upon my word, my dear, I must say that neither you nor I are at liberty just now to give way to our feelings. It is very painful, Clara, very painful indeed—Heaven knows I feel it to be so!—but left as we are, totally dependent upon our own energies and strength of mind, it is absolutely necessary that we should struggle to overcome the weakness of our natures, and attend to business.”

“I feel no weakness, madam,” replied Clara, quietly raising her head from its recumbent position, and pushing back the dark ringlets from her forehead, which hung in beautiful disorder about her face. “I know that there must be much business to do, and I am prepared to do it,—and most grateful shall I be, if you will help me in it. I fear I am very ignorant, though I would willingly be useful, and unless you tell me what I ought to do, I doubt if I shall do any thing rightly.”

In saying this, Clara thought only of the sad routine of mournful ceremonies which ought immediately to be attended to, and concerning the details of which she was painfully conscious she knew nothing. But Mrs. Longuéville interpreted her words in a much larger sense, and felt extremely well pleased at finding that her niece at length seemed disposed to give up that sort of self-willed pertinacity which had hitherto prevented her from obtaining such ascendancy over her as she believed to be absolutely necessary to her well-doing and success in life.

“My darling child! what is there that I would not do to help you?” replied Mrs. Longuéville, with a burst of new-born affection. “After all, Clara, you may depend upon it, that Providence knows what is best for us, and who shall say that your poor father has not been snatched from us on purpose, as it were, to bring us more closely together? It is a very merciful dispensation if it be so, Clara, and it is impossible we can be too thankful for it! Yes, my dear love, you do indeed want help, and help you shall have, Clara, from one who is willing to be a

mother to you, if you will let her. Women always do so much better when they are left quite to themselves! I have no doubt in the world but that you and I shall be fifty times better friends than ever we were in our lives. No fault of my poor dear brother's! Heaven knows I don't mean to say that, the least in the world! No sister ever loved a brother more, that nobody can contradict. Poor fellow! how he used to love his little game at *écarté* with me! didn't he, Clara? I certainly *have* the pleasure of knowing I was a good sister to him; no one can rob me of *that*—and it is a comfort, a very great comfort. But this is no reason why I should deny that it will be a pleasure and a pride to me, Clara, to become your friend and director. You have no idea how much may depend upon it. The fact is, my dear, and there is no need to mince the matter, that you are exceedingly handsome. It is exactly like having a fine hand at cards, my dear; if the best and the most is made of it, it may win you the game; but if you blunder, it is as likely as not that your adversary will get the odd trick, and leave you nothing to score but your age.”

It was very evident that the notion of having Clara, and her beauty, and her little fortune, all under her own management, was producing an extremely powerful effect on the spirits of Mrs. Longuéville. Clara saw and understood it perfectly; but, unwilling to bring her back to the state she had been in before, she made no direct reply to these visions for the future, but by gentle degrees so far fixed her attention upon the present, as to induce her to give many necessary orders, and to put in train all the idle pageantry that precedes the consignment of dust to dust.

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The funeral over, and the two ladies with their scanty retinue clad in sable weeds after the most approved fashion, Mrs. Longuéville informed her niece that she saw no advantage whatever in their remaining any longer in England.

“Bates has all necessary instructions about this house, Clara,” said she; “you have written to old Watts at the Grange, who will put every thing in order there for a sale of the furniture, before the new baronet takes possession—he has allowed us three months, you know—and you have now nothing left to do, as far as I can see, that should prevent our setting off for Dover on Monday. I should think you must long as much as I do to get off.”

“My dear aunt,” replied Clara, summoning all her courage for the contest for which she had been long preparing, “My dear aunt! are you aware that no day has passed, since the death of my father became known, without there having been a multitude of tradesmen's bills sent in?”

“Aware of it?—What an absurd question, Clara!—To be sure

I am aware of it. Do you think that, after having promised to assist you through every thing, I should so fly from my word as not to take notice of all the tradesmen's bills that have been deposited on the library table? Fie, Clara, fie! You do not do me justice. Indeed and indeed you do not!"

"How then can I think of moving away, aunt Longuéville? How can I turn my back on all these claimants without making some effort towards satisfying their just demands?"

"You do not mean to tell me, Clara Meddows, that you are so completely ignorant of every thing in the world as to fancy you have the power of paying your father's debts? Why, my dear, he perfectly well knew that it was quite impossible when he was alive, and had four thousand a-year to help him. How then are you to perform the miracle with just about four thousand shillings per annum? Pray, Clara, do not distract me with talking such nonsense. I shall be very sorry to quarrel with you, but upon my honour I shall lose all patience."

"I know that I have not the power of paying my father's debts, nor am I weak enough to hope that it can be ever done," replied Clara; "but I cannot help thinking, aunt, that as we have no friend upon whom you think it proper to devolve the duty, I ought myself to remain in England till all the property we have at our disposal has been sold, and the amount divided in equal portions among the claimants."

"You know not what you are talking of, child," replied Mrs. Longuéville. And this time Mrs. Longuéville was right, for poor Clara was utterly ignorant of all the mysteries of proving, executing, administering, etc., etc., nor had her excellent aunt the least intention of throwing a light upon the subject; having in her own mind very considerable doubts whether the recovered money, upon which she reckoned as the *matériel* of her favourite Paris plan, would be adjudged the property of Clara, if the scrap of paper found with it were taken to Doctor's-Commons, and proved to be either a will, or no will. She had placed it in the hands of her niece, where she knew it would remain safe; and her project was to tell her before they set off, that this bit of paper, together with all other papers whatever (excepting private letters) ought to be sent to the lawyer her father had been accustomed to employ, requesting his opinion on the best mode of settling the affairs, and giving him authority to receive the proceeds of the sale at the Grange, as well as any profit arising from the lease in Bruton-street, on the sale of the furniture there, if he decided it would be best that such a sale should take place. In short, she proposed to leave every thing in the lawyer's hands, save and except the four thousand pounds.

The packet containing the papers and instructions she talked of would not be delivered till she and her niece had left London ; and once in France, with these important nine points of the law in her favour which are derived, as the proverb saith, from possession, Mrs. Longuéville had little doubt that Clara's four thousand pounds might be safely and profitably vested, before the various knotty questions likely to arise out of the testamentary scrap of paper could reach her knowledge. Great, therefore, was her disappointment when, in reply to her exclamation upon her ignorance, Clara gravely replied,—“ I know that I am extremely ignorant of law, aunt Longuéville, and it is for that very reason that I am quite determined not to leave England till I have received a professional opinion upon what can and what ought to be done. I have no scruple in taking possession of the notes my poor father left to replace the sum which I sold out of the funds in the manner he has stated, because, this money having never been his property, his creditors can, I presume, have no claim to it; but I cannot endure the idea of taking refuge in a foreign country from the embarrassments that surround me here. I am determined to stay, and know the worst, let it be what it may.”

Mrs. Longuéville looked at her with an expression that very truly expressed her feelings, for it was made up of contempt and anger. At the first moment she felt greatly disposed to punish what she considered as intolerable conceit, by telling her niece that she was altogether wrong in supposing her right to the money which had been found was unquestionable ; but the prudent lady took wisdom in her wrath, and remembered that one word of the kind would be fully sufficient to deprive the firm of Longuéville and Meddows for ever and for ever of all and every profit and advantage to be derived from the said money. Whereupon she remained resolutely silent till the temptation of proving to her niece that she was a perfect fool was conquered, and then she said with a degree of scorn which relieved herself, without alarming Clara's honesty,—“ May I take the liberty of enquiring, Miss Meddows, what it is that you propose to do with your *propre personne* ?”

“ Yes, aunt, I will tell you readily. I intend to request old Mrs. Chesterfield to receive me as her guest, till all that belonged to my father at the Grange has been disposed of. I know I can be of use in this, and whatever money is received, either from rent or otherwise, shall be faithfully remitted to Mr. Wells, the lawyer, towards the payment of the just debts my father's testamentary paper mentions.”

“ You mean to take out letters of ad——,” began Mrs. Longué-

ville, but suddenly stopped herself, from a conviction that it would be more profitable for Clara to act without law than with it; and believing that nobody would be likely to visit very severely any blunders so young a person might fall into, she at once determined to withdraw herself from all responsibility by hastening her own departure as much as possible. "What I mean is," she resumed, "that in case you finally decide to remain for a time in England, you must, when you join me, take out any letters which you think likely to be useful to you. Not but what I shall be able to manage very well, I dare say, without your having any trouble. However, Clara, I hope you will not remain behind me long; and I would, meanwhile, advise you to let me take your money with me, that I may invest it advantageously for you in France, without losing any portion of the interest by unnecessary delay."

"If things go well, aunt, I shall hope ———, but about all this, I would rather take a little time. When shall you leave London, aunt Longuéville? I will not dismiss the servants till you are gone; but I shall retain no one but that steady woman we brought from Charlton, who will take charge of the house till it is let," said Clara.

"And is it your purpose, Miss Meddows, to remain in London with this establishment?" replied Mrs. Longuéville, inexpressibly provoked at the love of independence which her orphan niece assumed.

"Only till I have received the answer of Mrs. Chesterfield," she replied. "I have no doubt as to what that answer will be, but of course I cannot set off for Maplebury till I receive it."

"At any rate let no consideration for my convenience delay you for an hour," rejoined her aunt, "With your permission, I will send William instantly to the Dover coach-office, to secure places for myself and my maid by to-morrow night's mail. Every hour's delay on my part will be equally useless and disagreeable."

"And I," said Clara, "will write to good Mrs. Chesterfield by that which departs to-night. Most certainly I have no wish to linger in London."

No further discussion whatever concerning their respective plans took place between the aunt and niece. Mrs. Longuéville had much in her head and Clara much at her heart which was not ripe, in either case, for communication.

* * * * *

Nothing could exceed the cordial yet respectful warmth of kindness with which Mrs. Chesterfield replied to Clara's proposal of taking up her abode with her, till her affairs at the Grange

could be put in order. “My good friend, Charles, has prepared a welcome for me,” thought she; and she was more soothed and comforted by this idea than she could have been by the most splendid hospitality that could have been offered to her. It was now in truth a matter of deep rejoicing to her, that since her return to England she had never been permitted to remain long enough in Gloucestershire to have made any acquaintance in the neighbourhood. She had greatly liked the residence, and would willingly have made it her only home. But it suited not Sir George’s plans to keep up an establishment there; and his daughter now felt very thankful that she could return thither as a stranger, and be spared all the misery of reduplicated explanations concerning her situation and her plans.

Mrs. Longuéville executed her *projet de voyage* as promptly as she had conceived it; and Clara remained but two days after her, which she found sufficient for all she had to do. This *all* consisted in dismissing the servants; sending round to the tradespeople requesting them to send in their accounts to Mr. Wells; writing to Mr. Wells himself, informing him that she had so done; enclosing to him all the papers on business which had been found, together with the note which her father had written on leaving his house; and telling him that it was her intention to place herself with the family of Farmer Chesterfield, near the Grange, till the sale of all Sir George’s personal property there was effected. One other letter she also wrote before leaving London, the contents of which will be given hereafter. This done, she took her place in a stage-coach, and, without attendant or protection of any kind, arrived safely at Gloucester.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Singular Case of an obstinate old Lady’s changing her Mind—Correspondence between Miss Clara Meddows and Mr. Charles Chesterfield.

WHILE these scenes were being acted in London, Charles Chesterfield was getting over the little difficulties, and enjoying the great delights, of his readmission to his home, with so much good-humour as to the first, and so much warm-heartedness as to the last, that he became dearer than ever to every individual of the humble circle that again constituted his world. It is true that Mr. Westbrook did work him a little upon some of Mr. Marchmont’s sublime theories; and little Bessy took particular pleasure, on every occasion, to show that she considered herself as quite a child. All these, however, were but masquerading miseries, and were speedily driven off the scene by real happiness.

It was in the midst of all this renovated joy, that the news

arrived of Sir George Meddows's violent death; and though personal attachment towards him was probably not of a nature to make such news productive of acute anguish in any heart, the shock of such frightful tidings was felt by all; and when the orphan state of poor Clara was remembered, it was a true and genuine sorrow that was expressed by all. The venerable father of the family shook his head, and murmured his fears that the baronet would be found to have died considerably in debt. "I hope, I hope," he said, with some anxiety in his voice and manner, "that the poor dear young lady will be provided for."

"Thank God, father," replied Charles, "I can undertake to answer for that. I know from her own authority that she was perfectly independent of Sir George, and that's a comfort, whether your notions about him are right or wrong. But surely, father, you do not mean to say that there is any doubt as to Sir George's having left enough to pay his debts?"

"I do mean to say it, Charles," replied the old man, "for I know no harm that can be done by it now. So why should I make a secret of it any longer?"

"Why, father! Sir George told me himself that he owed you a thousand pounds."

"Did he?" said the good man, smiling, but not very gaily; "I rather wonder at his telling you so, Charles, and I can't very well guess why he did it—but, for all that, I am sorry to say that it is quite true."

"Nay, but there is no great need to be sorry about it, father, seeing that you have got such excellent security. He told me that he paid you nine per cent for it, and that it was secured upon his estate in Ireland."

"Upon his estate in the moon, Charles, he meant to say. He never had an acre in Ireland in his life, poor gentleman; and as to paying me interest, it was just as true to call it nine per cent as one; for from the hour I lent it to him, which is now three years ago, to the present moment, he has never paid me one single penny by way of interest or principal either; nor do I ever expect to get back a farthing of it."

Something very like the shivering fit of an ague seized upon our hero, as he listened to this statement; and, pretending to see somebody he wished to speak to in the orchard, he suddenly broke away, and hastened to reach a spot where he could think and feel alone. It was then that, for the first time, he became aware of all he owed to the generous self-sacrifice of Clara; it was then that he comprehended her real motives for the interference, which, by her own explanation of it, appeared little more than an act of mere good nature, intended to spare him the embarrass-

ment of having a painful avowal to make to his father. But now he saw the act such as it really was, and he trembled to think how likely it seemed that in the performance of it she might have most deeply injured herself. At first he felt inclined, as an act of penance for the folly which had produced this misfortune, to relate to his father all the circumstances which led to it; but the task was a painful one, and as no immediate good seemed likely to arise from it, he returned to the house determined at least to postpone it till he should be able to ascertain what the actual circumstances of his benefactress really were, and to decide whether it was now become a duty on his part to insist upon at least sharing the loss which the dishonesty of her father alone would probably never have brought upon her had it not been aided by his own weakness in so unadvisedly placing his money in the baronet's hands.

That he sincerely meditated upon such restitution did him the more honour, because the making it would have again hazarded all his future prospects of happiness. The favourite family project of making him a clergyman had been resumed greatly to his own satisfaction; and though, beyond this, nothing had as yet been settled, he had begun to entertain very sanguine hopes that all he now most wished in the world—namely, a union with little Bessy, might, in the course of time, be accomplished. But this, of course, could only be anticipated in case he retained the power of maintaining her, which, notwithstanding all his recently enlarged ideas, he still thought his little fortune, added to a curacy, might enable him to do. Not indeed that, even so, his path was quite clear before him. Bessy, it is true, had been already so far led to forget her childishness, and to remember that seventeen was really the age of rational womanhood, as to confess to him, just three days after his return, that, were it not for his good mother, who had showed her a hundred times over that she would never permit them to love each other except as cousins, that, were it not for this, she would own at once that she never would, nor never could, love any man but him. But, even as he listened with a beating heart to this dear avowal, he felt that the clause included in it was not without weight. He, too, and long before his journey to London, had perceived his mother's averseness to any nearer tie between his pretty playfellow and himself; but when the madness produced by that journey had passed away, he remembered, together with his mother's evident dislike to his attachment, a variety of cheering circumstances, which led him to believe that every other member of the family approved of it. But upon anxiously consulting all looks and words which bore upon the subject after his return home, he

began to fear that he had heretofore mistaken them, for he no longer perceived the same favouring symptoms.

The truth of the matter was that, notwithstanding Farmer Chesterfield's favourite dogma respecting the necessity of keeping women in their proper place, and never permitting them to talk of any thing they did not understand, his wife Dorcas was a person of great importance in the family. They all loved her very much, but they were all a little afraid of her too; for it was a fact of domestic notoriety among them, that, despite all the good farmer's boastings concerning the immutable nature of masculine authority, nothing was ever done to which she pertinaciously objected, and few things, the achievement of which was possible, were left undone if she particularly desired their accomplishment.

Such being the generally recognised state of the case, and the old lady's decided dislike to any allusion to love-making between Charles and Bessy having, before the young man's departure, become equally notorious, every notion of the kind seemed by tacit but general consent to have been dropped. Christopher had left off all his little jokes about Bessy's numberless good wifely qualities; the docile Susan had schooled herself into almost forgetting that she had ever wished to see her niece become Mrs. Charles Chesterfield; and the old man himself, though he would have stoutly denied the fact, had most indisputably abandoned all thoughts of calling his pretty favourite "daughter," solely because he perceived that his good woman had set her mind upon something else.

The result of all this, though not the progress of it, was quite perceptible to the young lovers, and all they could do was to declare themselves determined, according to the established rules in all such cases, to hold steadily to their own wishes and intentions, trusting to time and perseverance for the frustrating all wishes and intentions that might be opposed to them—a line of conduct more frequently successful to the result wished for, than the happiness expected to arise from it.

In their case, however, there was unquestionably a very effective anchor for their hopes to rest upon besides their pertinacity, in the recollection that, thanks to the good godmother, they were sufficiently independent to have their own way if they were determined upon it; and therefore it was that the young man's resolution to refund a portion, at least, of what had been restored to him by Miss Meddows did him honour. Had he at this time been in the least degree conscious of what was going on in the mind of his mother, this determination of his would have had less of generous devotion in it. But neither he nor anybody else had the slightest notion how very completely this good lady

had changed her mind. While listening to all the histories which the anxious questionings of the family elicited respecting his London adventures, she began to be aware that her darling would have a better chance of happiness among his own people, and in his father's house, than could be reasonably reckoned upon were he to take as a wife any body whatever, gentle or simple, out of that great good-for-nothing London, where every one, except Miss Clara Meddows, seemed to have disappointed him. Now the marrying him to Miss Clara Meddows had, somehow or other, never entered her head; and she therefore quietly made up her mind, without saying any thing particular about it, to bring things back again to the position they had been in before the news of the legacy reached them, and then to let said things take their chance; and if the two dear children really did love one another, to encourage them to speak out and say so. To an uninterested spectator there might have been some amusement in watching the various little manœuvres by which the good lady endeavoured to undo her own work; and truly, like other able artificers, she found it was by no means an easy job. There was not a single individual in the family who had not his or her particular reasons for believing, that if they wished to live in peace and unity, they must carefully avoid hinting, directly or indirectly, the possibility of the event which it was now the first object of her life to bring about. But old Mrs. Chesterfield knew perfectly well that "faint heart never won fair lady," and she stoutly resolved that the fair little maid she intended to win should not be lost for want of her having courage enough to unsay all she had formerly said about marriages that were suitable and marriages that were not.

Things were in this state at Maplebury farm, when the postman, a most rare visitor, stopped at the gate, and held up a letter, in token that the person whose face he saw peeping out of the window above the porch should come down and take it, without his having the trouble of descending from his donkey. Bessy, to whose eyes this token was presented, ran down stairs and out of the house-door with all speed, and was rewarded by finding that she should have the pleasure of presenting a letter to Charles, for it was to him that the despatch was addressed.

As many curious glances have been directed, perhaps, to the outsides of letters as to their contents; and as Bessy ran out into the orchard to seek her friend, her eyes held rather anxious communion with the fair characters in which the name of Charles Chesterfield was inscribed on that she carried. No ambassador, not even the Pope's nuncio, bears such outward and visible signs of being a messenger as does a morsel of paper folded into a

certain shape, and having a bit of wax upon it. Who so ignorant of all earthly things as not to know, on the very slightest glance, that this is a letter? Bessy held it up, as the postman had done, as soon as she was fairly within sight of him to whom it lawfully belonged, and was greeted by an exclamation, uttered in rather an animated tone, "For me? Who can it be from?"

"From a fair lady, Charles, I am quite sure of that," replied the postman's deputy, presenting it—"what very beautiful writing it is! You shall give this direction to me, as a copy, when you have done with it."

"I am sure I have seen the hand before," said Charles, musingly, "but I cannot recollect where. And then he fell into that most remarkable practice, equally general and incomprehensible, of studying the outside of the epistle, in order to guess vaguely concerning what he had both the right and power to learn perfectly, if he would only have been pleased to break the seal.

"Shall I leave you, Charles?" said Bessy, rather archly.

"Leave me? Yes, dearest, as soon as ever I wish to be without you."

"But as you do not yet know who that letter is from, Charles, how can you tell but you may wish me away when you open it?"

"If I do, Bessy, I will be sure to tell you so. But till I have ascertained the fact, you shall stay close to me, if you please, and just put your arm under mine, and now put your little finger in here under the paper on one side of the seal, and I will put mine in here, on the other side. Now then, tear away, and we shall discover the mystery together."

By the aid of this well-imagined arrangement the letter was speedily opened, and, casting his eye on the signature, Charles exclaimed, with considerable emotion, "Miss Meddows!"

It was with no movement of jealousy, either real or affected, that Bessy now withdrew her arm, but simply and sincerely that he might, without interruption, read what she knew must be interesting to him. "Poor young lady!" she murmured, as she drew herself away. "How dismal that black border looks!"

"Stay, Bessy, stay! Oh! listen to this letter. Hear what she writes about. Dear, dear Miss Clara! This will be quite as much your business as mine, Bessy. It will be the business of us all. Hear what she says. It is very melancholy, yet it gives me pleasure too."

Though Bessy was unshawled, and there was nothing better than an early February sun to warm her, Charles placed her upon their dearly-loved turf-seat, and nestling closely to her side, read aloud the letter of Clara.

“DEAR CHARLES CHESTERFIELD,—Before this reaches Maplebury, you will have heard of my poor father’s untimely death, and will, I am quite sure, have felt a pang for me while thinking of all that must have followed it. I now write to request that you will apply to your good parents in my name, to ask if, without inconvenience, they could receive me for a few weeks at their house.

“They will easily understand that there must be many things to be done at the Grange, before my father’s heir-at-law takes possession of it, which it would be right that I should superintend; but as I have given warning to all my father’s London servants, I think that I should find it very dismal and lonely, were I to take up my abode at the Grange, with only the old bailiff and his wife to take care of me. If your father and mother could receive me, therefore, without inconvenience, I should be exceedingly obliged. At all events, you will write to me immediately. Should it suit Mrs. Chesterfield and your good father to comply with my request, I would set off the day after receiving your letter telling me so. My aunt, Mrs. Longuéville, leaves London tomorrow, for Paris; and, of course, I shall not wish to remain long in Bruton-street after her.

“Believe me, dear Charles Chesterfield,

“Very sincerely your friend,

“CLARA MEDDOWS.”

“And now let us run to my mother this instant,” cried Charles; “only tell me first that you will love her, and be very, very good and kind to her. O Bessy! you do not know how good and kind she has been to me.”

“Then I will love her, and wait upon her like her slave and servant!” answered the warm-hearted girl, hardly conscious, perhaps, of the very ardent gratitude her accent expressed.

“Will you, dearest? Bless you for it!” and with these words he imprinted a rapid but sufficiently ardent kiss on the bright cheek beside him, starting up almost at the same moment, and leaving Bessy no time to think of or resent her offended dignity, so rapidly did he hurry her steps towards the house in search of his mother.

That estimable and very important lady was evidently much surprised at the purport of poor Clara’s letter; not, however, that she left the anxious question of her son—“May I not write this instant, mother, and tell her that you will be delighted?” long unanswered; but though she replied promptly, he could not help thinking that she was at least as much astonished as pleased.

“Dear me, Charles! Yes, to be sure, my dear. But upon my

word and honour you put me perfectly out of breath by being in such a hurry. And about the room! I don't know more than the child unborn what room she ought to have. Mercy upon me! Where is Susan? Do run, Bessy, can't you? Of course we shall be happy to see her—of course, Charles, of course. But what in this mortal world could have put it into her head to come visiting here, who can guess? Not I, and that I won't scruple to confess. Lord have mercy upon me! I am sure I always thought that it was best and fittest for me not to curtsy to her at church, the few times that she was down there, just because she might not have the trouble of returning it, so grand, and so proud, did I think her—and now to see her, such an heiress as she is too, I suppose, offering to come down, just as if she was one's own blood relation. Let any reasonable person say if it is not enough to puzzle one, and put one out?"

"You don't remember, mother, how much better she must feel to know you all now, than before I went up to London. She was kindness itself to me, mother, and notwithstanding her rank and station, I may truly say that she treated me like a brother, and that being the case, don't you think she must feel almost as if she had a right to come amongst us like a friend, instead of a stranger? Indeed, indeed, mother, I have no words to tell how kind she was to me."

"I am sure, darling, if that is the case, I don't want her to feel like a stranger to any of us; and all that is in my power to do shall be done to make her see and know that we are all properly grateful for her condescension and kindness. Nevertheless, Charles, there is no denying but what it is rather startling. But for mercy's sake, my dear boy, don't you keep me gossiping and argumenting here, when I can't for the life of me make up my mind even what room she's to be in—nor I shan't neither, till I have had a talk with Susan. Come along, Bessy, child, I can't spare you neither just now—not that I want to put you off from talking about this, or any thing else, to Charles. It is all very right and natural that you should like to talk together. And yet, Lord help me! if this is not enough to put all sorts of odd thoughts into one's head again, I'll be whipped."

By the time this speech was finished, Mrs. Chesterfield and Bessy were out of sight, leaving Charles not much more than half contented at the manner in which his news had been received.

Between the arrival of Clara's letter and this first moment of solitude, there had been no time for Charles to meditate upon the particular position in which he stood to her. He had only felt a general earnestness of wish and will, that her offered visit

should be received with gratitude and joy by his whole race, as well as by himself, without having had leisure to reason distinctly upon her claims to both, and it was only when he saw, or fancied he saw, that his mother was not quite so much delighted as he wished her to be, that he recollected how great an effect a single sentence of truth from him might produce; and no sooner did this idea strike him, than he set off to wander through the fields in order to find his father. "He shall know all!" thought Charles. "It is likely enough that he will tell me I was a fool, but it is certain that he will feel for her as she deserves."

The young man had taken the right direction, and soon found his father, who, together with Christopher, was busily engaged in assisting a shepherd, his boy, and his dog, in an important examination of a flock of sheep, previous to an approaching fair.

"If you are not very particularly busy, father, I should be greatly obliged if you would just take a turn with me as far as Nettle-copse. I have got something that I very much want to say to you," said Charles. "Do come at once, father, please. Will you?"

"Won't it keep for an hour or so, my boy?" replied the old gentleman, who really was very particularly busy.

"Not well, father, for I have got a letter to write about it, and I would not let this day's post go out without it for the world. Pray, dear father, come directly."

"Well then, Kit, you must go on without me," replied the good-natured old man; "you understand the business just as well as I do, that's one comfort—only I always like to be by, for custom's sake."

Arm in arm the father and son then strode away, and it was in a strain of no feeble or lingering eloquence that the sometime poet recounted the facts he had to communicate. The effect which his narrative produced was on the whole fully equal to his expectation; though the displeasure expressed at his own share in it was greatly less than he looked for.

"Then he was, out and out, a rascal, Charles!" cried the old man, almost trembling with indignation. "Villain! How he coaxed me, and gulled me about your going up!—You call yourself a fool, boy. What was your folly compared to mine? Tell me that, Charles. You had never heard his name mentioned but with respect; whereas I knew well enough, and to my cost too, that with all his old blood, and his graceful ways, grand and condescending-like in the same breath, I knew, if nobody else did, that he could pledge his word and break it, as easy as I can tie up

this bit of string and untie it again. I was bewitched, Charles, to let you set off with him, for I might have guessed fast enough, if I had but given it a reasonable thought, that he would never have dreamed of such a thing at all, but in the wicked hope, some way or other, of turning it to his own account."

"But think, father, of the noble behaviour of his daughter!" replied the young man. "I am sure she has done enough to redeem the honour of the family, if her worthless father had done a thousand times more to destroy it."

"Tell me that part of it over again, Charles. I don't rightly understand what it was you said about her share in the business. How could it come into her head to give it back again, if her good-for-nothing father made a secret of it?"

"Because an accident made me let it out to her—Yet it was no accident," continued Charles, correcting himself—"I opened my heart to her, and told her what I should suffer from not having the power of telling you and Kit what I had been doing with my money. But I told her this, without having the least notion that the sum I had thus privately lent to Sir George was in any danger of being lost to me.—Only I could not bear the notion of coming home with a secret."

"And as soon as you told her, poor dear, she saw at once, I suppose, that it was as much lost as if you had thrown it into the river Thames? Poor dear young lady! It must have been a grievous task for her—and I don't quite understand now how she came to have the power of getting it back from him."

"She never did get it back from him, father," replied Charles. "As soon as I had told her of the loan, and of my trouble about having promised not to mention it to you, she desired me to leave her, saying she would see me again, naming the time at which she wished that I should come to her. Of course I obeyed her exactly; and at this second interview she informed me that she had a fortune, independent of her father, which enabled her to repay me the money, which she very frankly told me I ought never to have lent without your knowledge; but she uttered no single word which could lead me to understand that there was any danger of her losing the money she thus restored to me. And yet, mercy on me! I now recollect that at our first interview, when I confessed to her all that had passed between her father and me, and my great trouble in consequence of it, the poor dear young lady seemed as if she were taken suddenly ill. I well remember that she turned as pale as ashes, and told me to leave her, and come to her again at four o'clock on the day following, as if she were over-fatigued by the conversation. But it is easy enough to guess now, father, what it was that came into her head

to make her turn so pale. Take my word for it, she felt certain at that minute, that Sir George would never pay me back one single shilling of my money."

"Ay, Charles, I'll take your word for it, and my own too. Poor dear girl! She has behaved like an angel, there is no doubt of that. And pretty lucky you may think yourself, my young gentleman, that her means were as large as her heart."

"I wish to Heaven I was quite sure that it was so," replied Charles, shaking his head. "How do I know, father, what she may have yet left?"

"What do you mean, boy? She could not have acted as you say she has done, had not the fortune that she told you of been really independent, as she said it was. It is plain that her worthless father could have had no power over it, or she could not have repaid you, however much she might have wished it. It was a blessed chance that put it safe beyond his reach, for, if he had had any power to dabble with it, depend upon it he would not have left her worth a penny. We may thank God for her sake, dear young lady, as well as our own."

"That whatever fortune she had was independent of her father is quite certain," replied the young man. "But I cannot help being very anxious about the amount of it. I cannot help fearing, father, that she has restored this money to me at the risk of wanting it herself; and this makes me very miserable."

"What has put that into your head, my dear boy?" demanded the old gentleman, smiling. "Though all you have told us about her leads one to believe that she is a most kind-hearted noble-spirited young lady, it is surely going a little too far to suppose that, in order to prevent your being ruined, she would consent to be ruined herself. That's quite nonsense, and not to be thought of, Charles. Of course she knew very well what she was about, and did neither more nor less than was just and proper."

"Well, father, I would far rather believe your notions on this point than my own. But now that I have confessed all about my own folly, I want you to read this letter, and I think your feeling about it will be just like mine."

The worthy farmer received Clara's open letter in his hand, looked at the delicate characters, shook his head, and then, securing it between his elbow and his side, deliberately put on his spectacles. But, despite this powerful aid, he had to turn and twist it about a good deal before he could master it. At length, however, he contrived to overcome all difficulties, and read the contents from beginning to end, without leaving out a single word, or uttering any observation till he came to the end of it.

"God bless my soul, Charles!" he then exclaimed, "Poor dear

girl! Poor dear young lady!—All her servants sent away—not even her own waiting-woman kept? I don't like it, I don't like it at all, Charles. But it can't be. I won't believe it. Why did you put such nonsense into my head?"

"You do not like her wanting a home, dear father, I can understand that. But I am very sure that you will like to receive her at your own. She will be welcome, father? Dear noble-hearted Clara! It will give you pleasure, father, to receive her, will it not? And about all the rest we shall find out afterwards."

"Welcome? What do you think I am made of, boy, that you should put it as a question? Away with you into the house this minute! Answer her letter in your best of manners. Tell her that it will be an honour, and a pride, and a pleasure to us. Let me see your letter, Charles, when you have finished it. Be sure you let me see it before you send it off, and, if I don't like it, upon my life I'll throw it into the fire, and write to the dear young lady myself."

Perfectly satisfied that the feeling in this quarter was exactly what he wished, quite sure of having Bessy's pretty smiles and gentle kindness at command, with good hopes of his mother's taking the thing at last in a right point of view, and with no fears that any body else could take it in a wrong one, Charles hastened with right good will to obey his father's command, and speedily composed an epistle which the old gentleman not only most highly approved, but undertook to put into the post with his own hands, having had his pony saddled expressly for the purpose, while the operation of writing it was still going on.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Miss Meddows arrives at Maplebury, and forms a confidential Friendship with Farmer Chesterfield—He is despatched by her to London on a delicate and important Mission.

A REJOINDER from Miss Meddows to this letter from Charles arrived at Maplebury as speedily as the post could bring it, cordially thanking the kind inhabitants for their promised welcome, and definitively fixing the next day but two for the arrival of their self-invited guest. The interval was passed by the females of the Chesterfield family in a delightful little bustle of small preparation, more indicative of their earnest desire that the young lady should be comfortable and pleased, than of any power of making their rustic residence resemble, in any respect, her accustomed home. Yet was the chamber at length fixed upon for Clara's sleeping-room the very perfection of countrified neatness and freshness; and Bessy, in particular, wearied not of entering

there for the purpose of altering her improvements, and improving her alterations, even to the very moment at which a post-chaise drove up to the garden-gate, and a tall young lady in the very deepest mourning stepped out of it, looking very pale, and without any attendant whatever.

Charles Chesterfield had for more than an hour been hovering outside this gate, in order to be ready to lead her through it; and assuredly it was a comfort to poor Clara to greet his friendly face looking anxiously towards her as she approached. Nor was his welcoming eye long the only one which greeted her. No sooner had the wheels of the post-chaise made themselves heard, than Farmer Chesterfield appeared within the porch, and in the next minute his neat and nicely-dressed dame stood beside him. Christopher was in the fields; Susan, if the truth must be told, in the kitchen; while Bessy, much too shy to bring herself forward, stood blushing, and peeping from behind the window-curtain in the parlour, though her heart, kind little soul! was springing forward to welcome the lovely guest, and her bright eyes were dimmed by tears of youthful sympathy and tenderness.

To a person around whom fate and fortune appear to have drawn a veil so thick as that which now seemed to envelope Clara Meddows, no ordinary circumstances can appear of great importance. Not but she was fully awake to the cordial kindness of her reception—she felt it thankfully; but the strangeness and novelty of the home for which she had petitioned, its almost uncouth simplicity and unwonted stillness, produced but a slight impression; they made but a part of the new existence for which she was preparing herself, and occasioned her neither pain nor pleasure, and inspired neither hope nor fear.

At the very earliest opportunity, however, she entered with the most perfect unreserve upon the subject of her father's debts with old Chesterfield; confessing to him that she had every reason to fear he had died insolvent, stating that she was aware of his having himself a claim of one thousand pounds upon the personal property left, and expressing her earnest wish to dispose of every thing available, in such a manner as to produce the largest dividend possible for the different claimants, both in town and country.

The old man kept his eyes very steadfastly fixed upon her as she spoke, and when she ceased, he said,—

“I will own to you, my dear young lady, that I am more sorry than surprised at what you tell me. We have been pretty well aware in this part of the country, for some time past, that your poor father was getting behind-hand; but however painful this may be to all the friends of the family, there is a great pleasure

and consolation, Miss Meddows, in knowing that you are amply provided for. There is nobody who knows you at all, my good Miss Clara, but will rejoice heartily at this. For though there may have been extravagance, nobody can trace any of it to you."

Clara coloured slightly, bowed her head, and said, "You are very kind, sir."

This was by no means satisfactory. Farmer Chesterfield was quite determined to discover what her real circumstances were, and equally so to refuse his consent to her making restitution to Charles of the money he had so weakly parted with, if it should appear that by doing so she had put herself to serious inconvenience. But notwithstanding the openness with which she spoke to him of the state in which her father's affairs were left, he already felt quite aware that he might not find her disposed to be equally communicative respecting her own. She resumed the conversation, however, in a tone of very friendly reliance upon both his good-will and power to serve her; ran over, with a greater *connaissance de choses* than could have been expected from her, the various property which would have to be brought to sale; and asked his counsel as to the best manner of discovering what persons had claims upon the proceeds, without raising fallacious hopes by the enquiry.

To all this he both listened and replied like the sagacious and faithful friend she expected to find in him; but when the subject seemed pretty well exhausted, and she proposed to join Bessy, whom she saw enjoying the sunshine in the orchard, he gently laid his sun-burnt hand upon her arm, and said, "Not yet, dear young lady,—do not run away from me quite yet. Were you consulting a younger man, Miss Clara, or one who had less known or less honoured your grandfather, it is likely enough that you might find him contented with hearing exactly what you might be pleased to say, without troubling you with any questions at all. But I cannot do that, Miss Clara. And there are more reasons than one for my thinking it right and dutiful that I should go further. Trust me, Miss Meddows, you shall find a faithful servant in me, and loving and attentive, though very humble friends in my family. But in return, I must have your confidence, young lady,—I mean in what concerns your money affairs, for without this, it is quite impossible I can be of any real service to you. You must excuse my freedom, therefore, if I bluntly ask at once, what the amount of your own independent fortune may be?"

"I see not, my good sir, how this can assist the business you have so kindly undertaken to assist me in," replied Clara, with some little restraint of manner; but suddenly stopping herself,

and holding out both her hands to the grey-haired old man, who sat wistfully looking at her, she added with touching sadness,—
“And yet, Mr. Chesterfield, I ought to thank and bless you for any questionings that show an interest in my concerns—for alas! I am very friendless!”

“No, no, not friendless, not friendless, Miss Clara. Humble folks may prove as firm friends as high ones,” replied the kind-hearted old man, taking her offered hands, “provided, you know, that they are firmly trusted.”

“Well then, my good friend, you shall be firmly trusted. The fortune I inherited under my uncle’s will was five thousand pounds,” she replied.

“Now then, Miss Meddows, you shall be trusted too; and I will confess to you that my good boy Charles has had no secrets from me respecting his silly money transaction with your father, nor has he been less confidential concerning your most generous conduct with him. Had your fortune been thirty, or even twenty thousand pounds, my dear Miss Meddows, I might not have thought it my duty to interfere in order to undo an act, in the doing which the heart which imagined it was sure to take delight; but as the case stands, I neither can, nor will, permit that you should leave yourself so nearly destitute, in order to prevent my son from suffering from the deserved effects of his own folly. No, Miss Clara, no, this shall not be. Your four thousand pounds shall be honestly restored to you, nor need you fear that Charles will ever feel the want of it as you must do. Would to God, my dear young lady,—forgive me for saying so,—but I would to God you were as well sheltered and secure from trouble of every kind as my good boy is. He neither does, nor can, want for any thing; and now that we have got him safe back again among us, there is not, I’ll be bound to say, any one member of the family who would care three straws whether he had lost his godmother’s legacy or not, provided he had not got it by means of injuring you.”

“That may be, and I am quite ready to believe it is so,” replied Clara with grateful earnestness; “but your own feelings will help you to understand mine, when I declare, as I now do most solemnly, Mr. Chesterfield, that I would rather, infinitely rather, labour with my hands to obtain my daily bread, than suffer your son to be ——, than suffer your son to lose his fortune thus, by the untimely death of my father.”

“Most surely, this is what the lawyers call an amicable suit, my dear young lady,” replied old Chesterfield, gaily; “and we must contrive to make it end to the satisfaction of all parties. But if you should happen to find that the old man you have to

deal with is rather obstinate, you must make up your mind to bear it this time, and remember to take a younger and more persuadable person for your adviser the next. And now, if you like it, we will walk out into our sunny orchard and look for Bessy Parkins, who will be the happiest little soul alive if you will condescend to let her walk with you."

Mr. Chesterfield moved towards the door as he spoke, and had already laid his hand upon the lock, when Clara stopped him.

"We must not end this conversation without fully understanding each other, Mr. Chesterfield," said she. "You have given me sufficient proof that you well deserve my fullest confidence, and you shall have it. It will be easy for me to show you that the restitution I offered Charles has proved to be merely that of returning him the very identical moneys which he placed in the hands of my father. It is actually in my power to do this, having found in his pocket-book precisely the same amount. This, I confess, I was very far from anticipating when I refunded, from a simple feeling of justice, the sum he had sold out of the stocks, by a transfer into his name of what stood in my own; but now I might replace this money in the funds to morrow, if I thought proper to do so, for the bills to the amount are at this moment in my writing-desk. Of course you will perceive that this makes every thing even between your son Charles and me."

It was certainly with very evident delight that the old man listened to this good news; and it was then only that he gave the slightest indication of feeling any value whatever for his son Charles's legacy. Clara watched this contrast in his manner with a smile of genuine affection and esteem, and it was impossible that any two persons could conclude a conversation on that most ticklish of subjects, "the pecuniary," with a more perfectly satisfactory result on both sides.

"Now then we will set out and catch Mrs. Christopher's pretty niece," said Clara; "but she moves about in the sunshine like a butterfly, and it will require a quick movement to follow her."

Old Chesterfield, to use his own phrase, suffered no grass to grow under his feet, while keeping the promise given to his orphan guest, respecting her affairs at the Grange and its neighbourhood. He soon learnt from the bailiff (the only person who had ever acted as steward; for, excepting his cook, Sir George had never indulged in expensive servants) that no rents were in arrears, and that on the small quantity of land immediately round the house, which had been kept in hand, as little stock of any kind remained to be disposed of, as it was well possible to believe. On the other hand, however, the good man had the satisfaction of reporting that there were but few and trifling

claims from any of the country trades-people, and that a sum greatly less than might reasonably be expected from the sale of the furniture would suffice to pay them all, provided a few sums borrowed upon large interest were not added to the account.

This was most welcome news to Clara. Of all the difficulties which surrounded her, the one which pressed the most painfully on her feelings was that she anticipated in paying the trades-people, who had hazarded the fruits of their time and industry by trusting to the honour of her family, and furnished them with the means of daily existence from believing in their honesty. These claims, which, by some strange distortion of the moral sense, are generally considered as the last to be attended to, were in her estimation so greatly the first, that knowing such at least could be honourably answered, relieved her mind from an intolerable weight, and enabled her to look forward with firmness to the destiny she was resolved to meet and to abide.

Believing herself, without the slightest shadow of a doubt, to be lawfully entitled to the notes found in her father's pocket-book, she of course believed also that she had a right to dispose of them according to her own will and pleasure; and no sooner did she discover that the butchers and brewers who had served the Grange were in a fair way to be satisfied, than she very complacently turned her thoughts to the execution of a project which had seized upon her very heart and soul the moment she had been made to understand that the money received from Charles Chesterfield had not been disposed of.

She had loved, passionately, devotedly loved, Arthur Dalrymple, but for several months she had been schooling herself into the persuasion that this love was not, nor ever had been, requited. To this, as she had repeatedly assured herself since the death of her father, she had as effectually sought to resign herself without a murmur either against fate or fortune, as to the sudden change of her position from being a young lady of fashion to an humble dependent upon her own exertions for support. The success of this struggle, which, such as it was, seemed to satisfy herself, was doubtless as much owing to the high-toned pride that made so essential a part of her character, as to the christian philosophy which it was her constant effort to acquire; but whatever might be the predominant feeling that had led her to the state of almost apathetic tranquillity in which she rejoiced, it was not of a nature that could enable her to endure the torture of believing that Dalrymple had been robbed by her father. Putting together all the circumstances which had reached her, the statement of her father respecting the account that was to be settled between them, his transaction with young Chesterfield, and his demand

upon herself, she felt little doubt that money to a considerable amount was due to him ; and that this terrible debt should be paid if every shilling she could command in the world could suffice to do it, she was resolved with an intensity of purpose that almost took away her breath as she meditated on the means of accomplishing it, from the eagerness with which she longed to put them in practice.

That she had still a thousand pounds in the funds, and that four times that amount reposed quietly in her writing-desk, were facts that greatly sustained her courage while meditating on the difficulties of her project. The first of these difficulties did not appear very formidable, as it consisted only in her ignorance of the debt ; but there was another, which made her tremble from head to foot as she thought of it. How was she to address him on the subject ? in her own person ?—and so seem seeking for a renewal of the intercourse which it had been his will so decisively to end ? No—not for a reward considerably dearer to her than life. How then was she to set about it ? Should she write to the London lawyer heretofore employed by her father, and now engaged in settling as he could between the claims of creditors and the proceeds of the property in Bruton-street ? No ; she rejected this, from feeling that it would not do to mix up her own transactions with those belonging wholly to the affairs of her father. She well knew that this payment to Dalrymple, furnished by her own means, could not be classed as one of these. She well knew that this reduction of her own independent means of existence was as completely a matter of self-indulgence, as if she had taken a fancy in her poverty to indulge herself still with a carriage and horses, *coûte qui coûte*. In short, the execution of this business was not without its difficulty ; and after several hours of very deep thinking devoted to it, she at length came to the conclusion, that if she could but obtain his consent, the best agent she could employ would be Farmer Chesterfield.

For this purpose, she again sought a private interview with the kind old man. Like every other member of the family, he would have joyfully undertaken any thing and every thing within his power to perform, that could either do her service or give her pleasure. Her gentle manner of submitting to the strangely new circumstances which surrounded her ; her noble freedom from every species of affectation ; her beauty ; her perfect temper ; and above all, perhaps, the gratitude which the confidential disclosures of the old man had caused them to feel for her generous care of Charles, had bound them to her, one and all, by ties of the strongest affection and esteem. Poor Clara felt this, and next to the sustaining influence produced by her resolution to

clear all pecuniary arrears with Dalrymple, it afforded her the best consolation under the oppressive circumstances which beset her, which she was capable of receiving.

“And what is there, my very dear young lady, that I can do for you?” demanded Farmer Chesterfield, affectionately pressing her delicate hand between his palms of horn; “I think I may venture to promise that there is nothing which you can ask that I can refuse, only just provided that it is in my power to do it.”

“I am very glad to hear you say so,” replied Clara with a smile, “for what I am now going to ask is no trifling thing—but when I tell you, as I can most truly do, that whatever tranquillity of mind I may still hope for depends absolutely and altogether on your complying with the request I am about to make, I do not believe that you will shrink from it.—And yet, Mr. Chesterfield,” she added, after sitting for a moment silent, as if meditating how she should begin, “I do very strongly suspect that you will think me wilful, and perhaps unwise, in this most resolute purpose. Do me, however, the justice to believe that I must have very powerful and important reasons for being thus resolute.—There is a gentleman, Mr. Chesterfield, who placed unbounded confidence in my unhappy father.” Her voice faltered, and again for a moment she was silent. Had she looked in the face of her venerable friend she would have seen more of tenderness than he was able to express, for his eyes were full of tears, though he spoke not a word, nor felt in any way capable of uttering one.

“To this gentleman,” she resumed, “a sum of money is owing, which it is my steadfast intention to pay. But there are some obstacles to my doing this, which I flatter myself it will be both in your power and will to remove. In the first place, I know not the exact amount of the debt; and in the next, I do not wish, myself, to have any visible agency in negotiating the payment of it. Under these circumstances, Mr. Chesterfield, I turn to you, feeling confident that if you can give up enough of your time to take a journey to London, in order to see this gentleman yourself, you will manage to settle the business for me, without letting my name appear in it at all.”

“My dear Miss Clara,” replied the old man, “I would be willing to do that, and a great deal more to serve you, if you will but teach me how it may be done. But I see not how this payment can be made from you to him without your name appearing in the transaction. Do you not perceive that this can hardly be, Miss Clara?”

“No, Mr. Chesterfield, no. It may be, and very easily, provided you will have the goodness to adopt the plan I would suggest. You have already, you know, undertaken most kindly to

make all payments for me here. Let this transaction be placed on the same footing, and there will be no need whatever that any mention should be made of my name."

"Quite right, quite right, Miss Clara: now I understand you," returned the good man, apparently much pleased. "I fancied—I was afraid that your proposal meant a—But I now understand it all perfectly; the debt to this gentleman, as soon as I have ascertained its amount, is to be paid from the proceeds of the sale which we hope to effect next month. That is your intention, is it not, my dear young lady?"

"Not so, Mr. Chesterfield," returned Clara, colouring violently.

"This debt, let its amount be what it may, is to be paid solely from my own funds. I know it to be considerable, to the amount of—but this matters not. If you undertake the commission at all, it must be with the understanding that whatever be the amount, provided it exceed not five thousand pounds, you make the gentleman of whom I speak understand that it will be immediately paid by you from property belonging to the Meddows, family, placed in your hands for the payment of Sir George's debts."

The worthy farmer looked very steadfastly in the face of the young lady as she spoke, which occasioned her to fix her eyes on the floor; thereby enabling him to persevere in the scrutiny he was making without reserve or scruple. The consequence of this was that before the interview ended, old Mr. Chesterfield became very perfectly persuaded that his beautiful guest had some inexplicable feelings respecting the gentleman in question, which in no way resembled any that were excited by other creditors. But the old man was a wise old man, and uttered no syllable that could make her suspect she had betrayed herself; on the contrary, she listened with very particular satisfaction to the tone of voice in which he replied,

"Very good, I quite understand you now. And what is the gentleman's name, Miss Clara? And whereabouts in London does he live?"

This was exactly the part of the conversation which she had the most dreaded; but, reassured by the tone in which the question was asked, she replied, with very tolerable composure, "Dalrymple is the name. I will give you, of course, his full address as soon as you tell me that you are ready to set off—and I hope, I hope, my dear kind friend, that this will be very soon. You can hardly imagine how greatly happier I shall be when this is done."

"To-morrow, if you like it, my dear Miss Clara," was the prompt reply. "Christopher can do without me for the next

week or so perfectly well. Let it be settled at once, if you please, that I shall go to-morrow. The jockey-cart will take me over to Gloucester in time for the evening coach, and there are plenty of hours left to-day for you to write any letters you may wish me to take for you."

"There will be no letters, my good Mr. Chesterfield," she replied eagerly, while a bright blush again mounted to her eyes. "Most carefully must you remember that my name must on no account be mentioned. And, therefore, of course you know I cannot wish to write."

"Never fear, never fear! I shall not forget that. But you might have had other letters to write, you know, Miss Clara."

"I have not a single correspondent in London," replied the isolated Clara, with a smile and a sigh. "So there is no danger that my letters should delay you. But is it not likely that your good wife may think this journey somewhat over sudden?"

"Not a bit, Miss Clara. I have my own principles, my dear Miss Meddows, about the proper place of women, saving your presence, and no female in my family ever thinks of interfering with my going and coming. I take particular good care to be master at home both in word and deed."

Luckily for the farmer's boasted independence, and for the gratification of Clara's impatience also, Mrs. Chesterfield made no objection whatever to his taking this trip to London; but, on the contrary, exerted herself so effectually to assist the project, that an admirably packed little portmanteau was ready for him at least three hours before the jockey-cart came to the door.

"Will you go with me, Charles?" said the old man jestingly, as he saw the vehicle appear. "Perhaps you would like to see some of your London friends?"

"No, thank'ye, father!" was the reply, uttered with a degree of fervour which resulted from the united ideas of Mrs. Sherbourne and little Bessy; "No—I think I'd rather stay at Maplebury just at present."

CHAPTER XXXV.

An Embassy, and its Result.

MISS MEDDOWS gave her worthy messenger, as she had promised, a full direction to Mr. Dalrymple; so that, albeit but little accustomed to find his way about London, the good farmer contrived to convey himself very safely to the chambers occupied by that gentleman in the Albany. Having told the servant who opened the door for him that he had come from the country in order to speak to Mr. Dalrymple on business, the intelligent functionary so delivered the message as to procure an immediate

order for his admission. Nevertheless, Dalrymple was at the very busiest moment of his preparations for the distant journey upon which he was going to start, and for which he had been preparing for several weeks past, by so complete and well-ordered an arrangement of all his English concerns, as proved that he did not contemplate a very speedy return; but, notwithstanding the engrossing nature of his occupation, which was that of arranging papers, he would not dismiss unseen "the respectable-looking country-farmer like" whom his servant described, and Mr. Chesterfield was accordingly ushered into the same room in which his son Charles had breakfasted with such extreme satisfaction about ten months before.

Dalrymple had expected to see some rustic Herefordshire neighbour come to consult "the squire" about some puzzling matter of business; but perceiving in the visitor so accurately described by his servant a perfect stranger, he desired him to be seated, with probably less feeling of impatience than might have been produced by an intruder of higher pretensions.

"I am afraid, sir, that I interrupt you," said Farmer Chesterfield, "but I came upon a sort of business that most people consider as a good apology for intrusion. I come to pay you money, Mr. Dalrymple."

"May I ask you to favour me with your name, sir?" replied the young man.

"My name is Chesterfield. Chesterfield of Maplebury Farm, Charlton, Gloucestershire," was the stout yeoman's answer.

Not even Clara Meddows herself, when the good old man had so anxiously watched her while giving her instructions respecting the business he was come to execute, not even the delicate cheek of Clara then showed a blush of more evident emotion than did Arthur Dalrymple as he heard this name.

"Oh! oh!" thought the rustic squire of dames, "the young gentleman knows, I will be sworn for it, who is the guest of old Chesterfield, of Maplebury Farm, Charlton, Gloucestershire. God grant a blessing on my embassy! They'd make the handsomest pair in Christendom."

"I think there must be some mistake, sir," said Mr. Dalrymple, rather haughtily, "neither yourself, nor any person of your family, can, I am very sure, have any money to pay, or any business to transact with me, whatever. Permit me to say, that I am particularly occupied at this moment."

"You would be right, as I believe, sir," returned Chesterfield, not noticing the offensive tone, "did I speak for myself, or, as you say, for any of my family, we not being likely to have the honour of having any business with a gentleman who, as I know

and believe, is altogether a stranger to our county. But it is not on account of me or mine that I am come, but from a young lady who is so condescending—that is, I don't mean I come from the young lady herself, but it is about the affairs of her late unfortunate father, that she has been pleased to put altogether into my hands. Miss Clara Meddows is the young lady that I believe I mentioned was staying in my house, and it is on account of money owing to you from her late father that I come to visit you, Mr. Dalrymple. And now I presume, sir, you will be able to understand me."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Dalrymple, rising hastily, "but I still believe there is some mistake. I considered every thing between the late Sir George Meddows and myself as cancelled by his death; and even were it otherwise, I must beg to repeat that I am at present very particularly engaged, and would much prefer your applying to my solicitor, whose address I will immediately give you. This is a subject upon which I certainly shall not enter either with you or any of your family."

"Ungrateful puppy!" would have escaped the lips of Mr. Chesterfield, had he at that moment thought aloud. He had perceived with astonishment and dismay the vehement and by no means agreeable effect which the name of Meddows had produced; and he now fancied that he read a feeling little short of hatred in the frowning brow and flashing eye of his companion. "My mission was to you, sir, and not to your lawyer," replied the offended old man: "if the work in hand is to be settled by lawyers, there had better be one of each side. I am no lawyer, Mr. Dalrymple; I am only a very faithful friend of the dear—of the whole Meddows family."

"The whole Meddows family," returned Mr. Dalrymple, with something slightly approaching to a sneer, "is likely, if report says true, to be speedily merged in your own, Mr. Chesterfield. But, be this as it may, I have really no time to spare, and must therefore wish you good morning."

"What in the name of all that's wonderful could ever have made her care for such a detestable puppy, or trouble her dear generous spirit as to whether he was paid or not?" muttered old Chesterfield, between his teeth, as he sternly and steadily looked in the haughty countenance of the indignant Dalrymple, who saw in this mission nothing but an insolent and unfeeling display, on the part of Clara, of the wealth and independence of the low-born race with whom her degrading attachment was about to connect her.

"I will not deceive you, sir," said the old man, at length, speaking loud enough to be heard. "There are reasons, which

I am not bound to give, which will prevent any lawyers ever being employed in this business; and your pride must either submit itself to stating the amount of the debt, and receiving payment from me, or most probably you will find yourself obliged to abandon your claim altogether. Now, sir, will you be pleased to give me a civil answer, and let me know to what amount your claim goes?"

"My claim, sir? Who dares say I ever made a claim? Who dares dream that I ever thought of it?" replied the chafed and unreasonable Dalrymple. "I can have nothing to do, it is quite impossible that either now or ever I should have any business to transact, either by my lawyer or otherwise, with you or any member of your family. Whatever may have passed between myself and the late Sir George Meddows, may surely be considered as sacred from your interference, and I cannot but consider it as a very unwarrantable impertinence, that you should have thought yourself called upon to examine into it. Once more, sir, permit me to wish you good morning, and be pleased to assure the lady, whom I presume you have the honour of calling daughter, that she need be under no apprehension of ever being troubled by any application from me."

Farmer Chesterfield stared at him as he made this harangue with the most unfeigned astonishment, and the incomprehensibility of it appeared in some degree to lessen his indignation; for he began to suspect that the young gentleman, from some cause or other which he could not comprehend, neither understood who he was, nor what he had been talking about. It was, therefore, with renewed patience, and a softened voice, that he replied, (quietly keeping his seat, notwithstanding the reiterated warning he had received to quit it,) "What you can mean, my good sir, about my daughter, is a great deal more than I have any power to guess. I have got no daughter; that is to say, no daughter born to me, though my good son Christopher has taken for his wife one that any man might be happy to call daughter, and so well do I like the breed, that, as far as I am concerned, I should make no objection to my son Charles being indulged in his fancy of giving me her niece for another daughter; but how you ever, sir, came to suppose that either Susan or Bessy should be under any apprehension about a claim from you, is what I never shall be able to understand, when it is most likely that neither of them ever heard your name in all their born days: and I can't but say, Mr. Dalrymple, that it is a poor sort of compliment to Miss Meddows, the orphan daughter of a person you appear to have considered as your friend, to run off in this wild manner from her affairs in order to send such a very unaccountable message to my daughter."

“Mr. Chesterfield, I beg your pardon; I fear, indeed, I have received you very strangely,” replied Dalrymple, again changing colour; “but I have been hurried and harassed to-day, dreadfully; and, to tell you the truth, I believe I was thinking of quite a different business. Will you have the kindness to excuse this? and will you enter at more length and with greater explicitness upon the business that brought you here?”

“Upon my word, sir, there is nothing I wish more than to explain my errand, and settle it satisfactorily to all parties; and for this purpose I think my best plan is to tell you plainly, and at once, that I am sent to you by Miss Meddows; though, for some reason or other, the dear young lady seems to wish that you should not know it.”

“You are very kind, very kind indeed, Mr. Chesterfield! May I not offer you some refreshment? I recollect all about your family now, perfectly. And your son Charles is going to be married, is he, Mr. Chesterfield? I knew your son Charles extremely well when he was in London; and I am very glad he has made a choice that seems likely to please you. Is it an old attachment, Mr. Chesterfield?”

“Why, considering the age of the parties, I think I may say it is an old attachment, for I believe it is pretty well clear to us all now that the love between them has been going on these two years; and truly, I am much obliged to you, Mr. Dalrymple, for remembering my boy so kindly. He made but a foolish sort of a business altogether of his journey to London, I know that, but I well remember his writing me word of the favour you had done him in asking him to breakfast.”

“Yes, indeed, I perfectly remember his breakfasting with me, and a very fine promising young man he is. Do let me order you some refreshment, Mr. Chesterfield, and then we shall be able to talk at leisure of poor Sir George Meddows, and——his affairs.”

“Well, sir, I won’t refuse a crust of bread and a glass of beer, if you happen to have such a thing,” replied the old man, again thinking his host handsome and grand-looking enough to make a fitting husband for his admired guest, and moreover very satisfactorily convinced that his thoughts had in good truth been wandering to some different concern when the conversation commenced so inauspiciously. “It was a blessing, at any rate, that I kept my temper,” thought the old man, “and now I hope that all will go smooth with us.”

Mr. Dalrymple now rang the bell, and when it was answered, not only ordered the servant to bring a tray, but strictly enjoined him not to let any person in whatever, as he was going to transact

business that must on no account be interrupted. But before he referred to this business, concerning which he now appeared quite as anxious as the negotiator, he waited till sundry viands, accompanied by both wine and beer, were set before his guest, and then, steadfastly determined to learn all and every thing concerning Clara which the old man had power to tell, he led him to eat, to drink, and to talk, with a kindness of manner that was in very striking contrast with the style of his reception, as well as with the state of mind in which his visiter had found him.

“And my poor friend’s daughter is with you, my good Mr. Chesterfield, is she? Upon my word, it will be a great satisfaction to me to hear some particulars about her. How comes it that she is not with her aunt? You know Mrs. Longuéville, I suppose?”

Mr. Chesterfield, who was very far from being a stupid old man, watched the “altered eye” of his young host, and remembering his own observations on Miss Meddows during the conversation which preceded his departure, determined, after having refreshed himself with a glass of excellent Scotch ale and a bumper of Madeira, that the two young people should not be kept asunder by any misunderstanding as to why poor Clara was not with her aunt. He therefore replied, “The reason is one, Mr. Dalrymple, that does her honour, poor dear young lady! It is a piteous sight, sir, to see one so young, and so beautiful, and so little likely to have been taught by her father, or her aunt either, what honesty was—it is a piteous, but a charming, sight too, to see her, after such dreadful scenes as she has been passing through, thinking of nothing in the world about herself or her own comforts, but only how she might do her duty by every body.”

Dalrymple’s heart throbbed with a violence that almost choked him. “Thank God! she has met with a kind friend in you, Mr. Chesterfield; you, at least, sir, have known how to do her justice. I envy you; but go on, go on—I pray you let me hear all you know about her.”

“Indeed, sir, I don’t see any reason why you should not,” replied the old man, raising to his lips the glass which Dalrymple had replenished. “And as it happens, I doubt if there is any body now living in the whole world that *could* tell you so much about her as I can. I don’t see why I should mince the matter, Mr. Dalrymple, but it is now as plain as possibly can be, to my mind, that from the very first, when Sir George made such an unaccountable fuss about taking my son Charles up to London, it was for no other reason upon earth but because he thought he should be able to get at his legacy. As you knew

Charles, Mr. Dalrymple, I take it for granted that you must have heard speak of his legacy, sir?"

"Yes, sir, yes, I have indeed. But pray go on with what you were saying about Miss Meddows."

"Why, sir, she showed from the very first a goodness, and a wisdom too, that was quite astonishing. Poor thing! Poor young lady! It is terrible to think what she must have suffered in her mind, and she so nobly honourable too! But it is plain that she suspected *why* my poor foolish boy was invited, and she did her very best to stop his going, but he was in no way to hear reason then, nor to be affronted either, with all the cross proud looks she took care to give him, with the very best of motives, as he is now ready enough to confess. But see how she behaved, Mr. Dalrymple, when she found she could not prevent his going. Why she was as kind to him as if he had been her equal, and never forgot any thing that she thought likely to be good and useful for him. But all that is nothing to what came after, as you shall hear, sir.—Why should I be ashamed to tell it? My son isn't the first, by many, that has fallen a prey to such a skilled and artful man as Sir George Meddows. In a word, Mr. Dalrymple, to make a long story short, no sooner was my foolish boy of age, and his little fortune of four thousand pounds in his own hands, than Sir George contrived to do him out of it. As soon as this was accomplished, and not before, the silly fellow told his good friend, Miss Clara, of it, but without having the least notion, observe, that his money was in any danger. But the poor daughter knew better, that was plain; and what do you think she did, sir? Before ever Charles quitted the house, she went and got four thousand pounds out of her own fortune (she had but five in the world, Mr. Dalrymple) and bought it into the stocks again in his name, my Charles's name, and so sent him home again to us just as rich as he went, and, thank God! a great deal wiser."

Dalrymple with difficulty suppressed a groan, as he heard this explanation of a transaction which had caused him not only to withhold his friendship at a moment when it was so greatly wanted, but also to accuse her in his heart of hearts of being exactly the reverse of all she was. He rose from his chair, and walked about the room for a minute or two, and then reseating himself, again repeated, "Go on, sir, go on."

"Well, Mr. Dalrymple, it was not many days after this before the finishing misery came, and her wretched father was brought home to her, killed in a duel. Her aunt, it seems, who I always thought was another Sir George in petticoats, her aunt wanted her to set off for France immediately, clawing away, I suppose,

all they could lay their hands upon. But that was not a plan to suit Miss Clara. As her aunt persisted in going before any thing was really known about the affairs, the dear young lady bethought herself of my good wife and me, and wrote to ask if we would take her in, while she set things a little in order, towards paying what was owing at Charlton, and just round about the Grange."

"But from what funds, Mr. Chesterfield, can Miss Meddows attempt to pay her father's debts? Does she not know that he died utterly insolvent?"

"She seems to know, sir, dear pretty creature, that he has gone on borrowing and taking up money, more a great deal than she can ever hope to see paid, but, though she has been brought up so much among foreigners, she has a true English honesty and good sense too about her. We are in hopes, Mr. Dalrymple, that the furniture and what trifle of stock there is at the Grange may bring money enough just to pay the trades-people, and that is what seems to lie the heaviest upon her heart, dear kind soul."

Again Dalrymple groaned in spirit as he remembered all his prejudice and injustice. "But you are so kindly frank with me now, Mr. Chesterfield," he said, "that I think I may venture without offence to ask you from what funds she intended to pay me?"

"Ah, sir!" replied the old man, shaking his head, and looking as well as feeling a little conscience-stricken; "my old tongue has already exceeded its commission, and the question you now ask is just, beyond all others, the very one she would least like I should answer. I am sure I meant her no harm by my plain speaking, and I trust in God I have done none."

"Mr. Chesterfield, I will be as frank with you as I wish you to be with me," replied Dalrymple. "I certainly most strangely misunderstood you at first, but the moment I really knew what you were talking about, I have had but one wish—namely, that we should most cordially act together for the benefit, for the protection, Mr. Chesterfield, of this most excellent but unfortunate lady. And how—let your excellent good sense answer me—how can this be done, if there be any concealments between us? Fear not that your confidence in me may do harm. You do not wish to serve Miss Meddows more ardently than I do."

"Well then, Mr. Dalrymple, you shall hear the truth, and nothing but the truth. When I found how badly money matters were likely to turn out with her, Charles, and I too, got to feel very uncomfortable, thinking what she had done about paying back what her father had been rogue enough to borrow, and so I told her. Whereupon she said that she could set my heart at ease about that matter, for it had turned out that Charles's money,

which I suspect she thought had been borrowed to pay you, had never been disposed of, but was found in the slaughtered gentleman's pocket-book after his death. And sure enough it did set my heart at ease for a bit; but then I found, sir, that it was so very earnestly her wish and will that whatever her father left owing to you should be paid that I found there was no chance of her being easy till this was done: and I can only hope that your claim is not a very heavy one; for that is the only chance there is of her having a penny left."

"I have no claim, my good friend," replied Dalrymple, but in a tone far different from that in which he first made the statement. "But it may, perhaps," he added, in a voice not over steady, "it may be better that I should explain this to her myself; meanwhile, my dear sir, I cannot help feeling considerable anxiety about the course she is pursuing. Upon what legal authority does she act, Mr. Chesterfield? How can she undertake to sell and to pay? Is she her unhappy father's executor?"

"That's what I don't know, sir," replied the worthy farmer, looking a little alarmed. "I don't think she is likely to know much about the law herself, and I can't say that I have heard her mention that she has had any professional gentleman to tell her what she might, and what she might not, do."

"We must take care, Mr. Chesterfield, that she does not follow the dictates of her own pure and honourable mind with greater freedom than the law allows. I received a letter from Mrs. Longuéville before she left England, informing me that her brother had died without a will, and in great embarrassment, and also that his daughter had not administered to his effects. If this be so, your noble-minded client, Mr. Chesterfield, must neither sell nor pay. I would advise you, my dear sir, to return with all haste to Gloucestershire, and put an immediate stop to any proceedings which may have been commenced relative to this projected sale. Meanwhile I will—I will delay my departure from England, Mr. Chesterfield, long enough to ascertain here what the actual state of Sir George's affairs was at his death; and when I have ascertained this, I will communicate farther with you."

"I shall be greatly comforted, Mr. Dalrymple, by having such assistance, for I won't make any secret of the fact that I have more good will than knowledge how to help her. But would it not be a great comfort to her, Mr. Dalrymple, if she could receive your good counsel in person? She who so well deserves that she should have for friends all that are good and honourable in the whole world, does not seem to have one. It strikes me that, for the most part, her father's friends, and her aunt's friends too, by what I learn from my son Charles, were no ways likely to suit her

taste; and with all her sweet temper and goodness, and I'm free to say that I don't believe anybody ever had so much—she has got a touch of pride in her, Mr. Dalrymple. But somehow, sir, I don't think that you, though you was so intimate with her father, can be of the same sort as most of 'em; and it seems to me that it would be but a friendly act if you was to come to Maplebury, and give her your own judgment upon all these difficulties."

If, instead of being one of the most straight-forward and simple-hearted men in the world, Farmer Chesterfield had been one of the most subtle, he could not by possibility have framed a eulogy more calculated to ensure the effect he desired; not a word of it but went straight to the heart of his hearer: that heart which had dared to doubt the nobleness of Clara! But it was with no venomous sting that they pierced him; on the contrary, every searching syllable seemed to bring healing honey with it, making him feel, perhaps for the first time in his life that he had felt it fully, that happiness might yet be in store for him.

But how was he to answer the worthy farmer's frank invitation? By frankly saying he would accept it? Should he let Mr. Chesterfield go home, and tell Clara that the man who had so rudely broken off all intercourse with her was coming to pay her a visit? It was not to be thought of. No trembling envoy approaching a despot's throne ever felt so sincere a desire to demonstrate profound deference in his homage as Dalrymple did now, as he again ardently, yet timidly, conceived the hope of being permitted to approach the orphan daughter of the profligate and ruined Meddows. He fixed his eye silently on old Chesterfield for a minute, but it was kindly, and smilingly; and then he said, stretching out his hand towards him,

"You are surely right, my good friend, in thinking that it will be my duty to wait upon Miss Meddows, whenever I may have any intelligence to communicate that may be useful to her; and I will not fail to do so, Mr. Chesterfield. But as it must be very uncertain when I shall be able to do this, I would rather, if you please, not say any thing about my intention of visiting Gloucestershire to Miss Meddows. Will you have the goodness to promise that you will not name it to her?"

"Is that, sir, because you feel uncertain whether you shall come or not?" demanded the old man, with a feeling of deeper interest than he wished to display.

"No, Mr. Chesterfield," replied Dalrymple, "that is not the reason; I wish for nothing more earnestly than to see Miss Meddows, and set her noble mind at rest about my fancied claims; but I shall be much obliged if you will give me your promise not to mention my intended visit."

“I give you my promise that I will not,” returned the old man, perfectly satisfied, as it seemed, with Mr. Dalrymple’s intended mode of proceeding. “But yet, sir,” he continued, “it will be necessary, you know, that I should render to the young lady some account of our interview. I have a notion, somehow, that she will feel a good deal of anxiety to learn what has passed between us.”

“Do you think so, Mr. Chesterfield?” said Dalrymple eagerly, while the colour mounted to his temples; but checking himself, he added very quietly, “then have the kindness to inform her, sir, that I told you the accounts she wishes me to furnish are not yet ready, but that when they are properly made out she shall receive them.”

A very few minutes more sufficed to finish the interview, which, notwithstanding its rough beginning, ended with very cordial good-will on both sides.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

All Things approach towards a Conclusion.

WHETHER Miss Meddows was satisfied or not with her friendly messenger’s report of his embassy, did not appear; for no sooner had she received it, than, having once more repeated, “God bless you, sir, I thank you very gratefully,” she retreated to her bed-room, and was seen again by no one for the next three or four hours.

Farmer Chesterfield felt a little embarrassed as to the manner in which he should contrive to obey Mr. Dalrymple’s behest, and do absolutely nothing respecting the projected sale at the Grange, without leading Miss Meddows to believe that he was neglecting her interests. He feared her accustomed daily enquiries as to how the business was going on, but nevertheless he was very steadfastly determined that go on it should not; for without having any very clear idea of what he expected from the promised visit of his new acquaintance, he had a sort of mysterious faith in his power of setting every thing right, which it was more easy to rely upon than explain.

One whole week passed on thus, laggingly enough; but, fortunately for old Chesterfield’s veracity, who had, as he expressed it, a great dislike to telling downright lies, Clara seemed to have lost much of the energy with which she had begun her operations; and when in answer to her languid inquiry of when the sale was likely to take place, he replied that as yet it was quite impossible justly to say, she sighed with so absent an air, as to

leave it doubtful whether the feeling of sadness thus expressed arose from this uncertainty, or from some other cause.

Three days of the second week since the farmer's return from London had worn away, and his confidence in Mr. Dalrymple's promised assistance began to be considerably shaken, when, as he was leaving his house after breakfast to visit some of his more distant fields, he perceived a travelling-carriage drawing up at the distance of a few hundred yards from his house, and a gentleman sprung from it whom he instantly recognized as the individual with whom he had been closeted in London, and whom, at that moment, he more ardently desired to see than any other individual whatever.

For a mere matter-of-fact old rustic, Farmer Chesterfield appeared to have some very judicious notions as to the most favourable manner of arranging an interview between a lady and gentleman, concerning whom he had taken it into his head that they had a good deal to say to each other. No sooner did he catch sight of Mr. Dalrymple, than instead of bustling forward to meet and welcome him, as a duller man might have done, he turned suddenly round, and, by means of scrambling over some hurdles, made a short cut to the house, in time to call Bessy out of the parlour, where she was sitting *tête-à-tête* with Miss Meddows, and to order old Rachael to show into it the gentleman who had just opened the garden gate. This done, he took care to make it understood by the household, that Miss Meddows was talking on important business with a person just arrived from London, and must on no account be interrupted. And then he very quietly betook himself to the orchard, determined to employ himself in an accurate examination of his leafless fruit-trees, till the *tête-à-tête* thus carefully protected in the parlour should be over.

Old Rachael, meanwhile, performed the duty assigned her with great propriety; and having let the strange gentleman into the hall, opened the parlour-door, and shut it upon him when he had entered, exactly as she had been told to do.

Near to the pretty window which opened upon the orchard, was stationed an arm-chair of magnificent dimensions, appropriated by prescriptive right to the mistress of the house; but, during her absence, Clara had taken possession of it, and now sat with her pale but beautiful cheek resting against the snow-white covering of its cushioned side, and her sad eyes settled with more of inward than outward speculation in them upon the checquered light and shade without. It was not the opening of the door which roused her from her reverie, for if she heard it she noted it not, but this was followed by a heavy breathing

that seemed near her, and then Clara, turning her head, beheld Arthur Dalrymple standing almost close beside her.

She did not scream—she did not faint; but neither did she speak nor move, and, her eyes once fixed upon the face of her most unexpected guest, she seemed to have no power of withdrawing them; almost the only symptom of her consciousness being that they were filled with tears. For half a moment Dalrymple stood as if intending to speak to her in an ordinary way, but he had no power to do it, and, dropping on his knee beside her, he seized her hand, and bending his head till his forehead touched that trembling hand, he very wisely permitted a moment of most eloquent silence to preface the history he had to tell. Either this silence, or the words which followed it, must have possessed peculiar clearness of explanation, for, considering how perfectly unexpected was all he said,—nay, how totally in contradiction to all her foregone conclusions, it was quite wonderful how quickly and completely she understood him.

How long they remained together is not exactly known; but it is probable that the interview was not a short one, for Farmer Chesterfield, though he had begun the examination of his trees in the most slow and deliberate manner possible, had completed the task long before any indication appeared that the consultation in the parlour was over. So he quietly proceeded with his ordinary routine of morning business; and when he returned to dinner, he found Mr. Dalrymple lingering in the porch alone, waiting, as he said, to have the pleasure of shaking hands with him, and of giving him the very agreeable information that, from the various inquiries he had made, it appeared clear to him that it would be a very easy matter to pay all the tradesmen who had claims against the late Sir George Meddows, without having recourse to any public sale whatever.

The well-behaved old man endeavoured to look as grave as a judge while he listened to this; merely observing that he was exceedingly glad to hear it, as it would save a great deal of trouble. He then very cordially invited Mr. Dalrymple to share their family dinner; but he was assured in return that this was impossible, inasmuch as several letters which were to be forwarded by that night's post were still to be written.—“But I shall be happy to take tea with you, Mr. Chesterfield,” added the young man, “if I may be permitted to do so.”

Farmer Chesterfield did not appear to think that there was any objection to this, but, on the contrary, declared that they should be very glad to see him; whereupon they once again shook hands very cordially, and parted; the old man entering the house to join his family, and the young one taking his solitary

way to the little inn to which he had been directed on entering the village as "the best in the place." What sort of a dinner he found there has never been recorded; but Mr. Dalrymple has been repeatedly heard to declare since, that this solitary walk and the solitary meal which followed it, were among the most delightful recollections of his life.

On entering the family sitting-room, where the dinner-table was already spread, old Chesterfield looked round with some anxiety to see if the usual party were all assembled, and perceived that all were there, save one; the sable robes and pale fair face of his lovely guest were not visible. But this circumstance did not in any wise seem to disturb the good farmer; on the contrary, he immediately undertook to make an excuse for her, volunteering the information that Miss Meddows, to his certain knowledge, had letters to write, and that he should not wonder if she did not come down to dinner at all. But just as he concluded the sentence, the correctness of his information was rendered doubtful by the gentle entrance of the fair creature to whom it related.

Clara's place at table had always been between Charles and Bessy, each of whom seemed to assume a particular right to take care of her on all occasions; she now moved on to this accustomed place as usual, taking hold of the young girl's arm as she passed her, and pressing it with a degree of affection which not only produced an answering pressure in return, but caused Bessy to look up fondly in her face, as if to thank her for it. What was it she saw in that beauteous face to puzzle and almost startle her? There were no vehement feelings strongly written there—no feverish lustre in the eye—no dimpling smiles around the mouth—every feature was still in sweet harmonious repose; and if the soft cheek were a thought less pale than usual, its delicate tint had not more colour in it than might be seen on the extremest verge of a wild-rose leaf. And yet, not even Bessy, with all her unschooled ignorance, could look at her without perceiving that she was no more like what she had been, than a young eagle, soaring in light and joy, was like one pierced by a poisoned shaft, and sinking with a drooping wing to the earth.

As to old Chesterfield, had he yielded to temptation, he would certainly have gone without his dinner, for the pleasure of gazing at her; for though every member of the family thought to themselves, as they looked at her, that she was beyond all doubt the most beautiful young lady in the world, and, somehow or other, looked a great deal more beautiful on that day than they had ever seen her look before, it was he alone who could give the slightest guess at the why and the wherefore, or comprehend

that the indescribable halo which seemed visible about her arose from her feeling herself the happiest being that moved between the earth and heaven, instead of one to whom every thought had been a sorrow, and every sensation a pang. Poor Clara! She had in truth suffered bitterly; for, by a strange fatality, all her best and noblest qualities had, through nearly the whole of her short life, been continually at war with all that surrounded her, making her sometimes almost tremble at her own hardness, at finding her wishes and her will in eternal opposition to the wishes and the will of those whom nature had given as her rulers and her guides. And, as it ever happens, now that this galling source of sorrow was removed, her past suffering became the measure of her present joy; and at last to know and feel herself valued and loved by Dalrymple caused a perfection of happiness, which none who have not suffered can ever feel.

The loves of Clara and Arthur have not made a sufficiently important feature in this narrative to justify any lingering of the pen in describing at full length the happy conclusion at which they at last arrived. The good-natured reader may, however, very safely indulge himself or herself, as the case may be, in believing this to have been exactly all they could wish it. There was, however, a good deal of clever management necessary on the part of the gentleman, before the lady could be made aware of the absolute necessity of bringing things to a very rapid conclusion, in order to avoid the many inconveniences which must inevitably have arisen from delay. There was really much truth in this statement, lover-like as it was, and Dalrymple made the most of it. It was quite certain that Clara's ignorance of English law had led her to invest herself with powers in the settlement of her father's affairs, to which she had no claim; and it was equally so that the safest and simplest means of setting all this right, was by *her husband's* taking out letters of administration, enabling him to dispose of whatever property there was, and permitting him, without impropriety, to supply all deficiencies left by these very inadequate funds from his own ample means.

For these excellent and unanswerable reasons, Clara Meddows became the bride of Arthur Dalrymple so speedily as to make her feel, as she said, as if the whole of this marvellous metamorphosis in her destiny had been the work of enchantment. Most of the friendly lookers on at Maplebury were considerably less astonished at all this than herself; but it may be a question whether she or they were most pleased when, among the numerous announcements of arrangements made, and business transacted, which every post brought, between the arrival of Mr. Dalrymple as a bachelor and his departure as a benedick, it was made known

that the present Sir George Meddows had consented to sell the whole of his property at the Grange, and that Clara's affianced husband was the purchaser.

Within two days after this, the marriage was solemnized in the parish church of Charlton, by the venerable Mr. Westbrook; Farmer Chesterfield giving away the bride, and the happy Bessy officiating as bridesmaid. On which joyful occasion Mrs. Chesterfield, the elder, gave one or two such very intelligible hints that her opinions had undergone a remarkable change respecting the eligibility of Bessy as a wife for her son Charles, that before the moon was fully risen on that night, the young pair were solemnly affianced to each other.

From the church door, Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple set off for Dover, and, after a leisurely and by no means unpleasant journey, arrived in Paris, where they were welcomed and felicitated by the elegant Mrs. Longuéville, with all the ardour which such a heart and soul as hers is sure to feel towards a niece so circumstanced as was the bride. Their residence in the gay capital was, however, not long; Italy was before them, with all her hoarded treasures of art, and all the eternal splendour of her sun; and thither they repaired, among the very happiest of the many happy, who employ their first long flight from home in crossing the stern fence with which nature has enclosed her favourite garden. Of all they did, and all they saw, there is no space to tell; but two such years as they passed in Italy almost sufficed to make them forget that they had ever accounted themselves unhappy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Last.

ANOTHER two years must be permitted to pass before we return to take a final look at Charles Chesterfield, the youth of genius. Things had gone very differently with him from all he had wished and hoped at the bright moment when he took his seat in the dickey of Sir George Meddows' carriage, when he first left his quiet home for the spirit-stirring scenes of the great metropolis. It would be hardly too much to say that he had endured the disappointment of every hope which at that moment had caused his heart to swell, his blood to dance, and his eye to sparkle. But if there be any mixture of justice in human criticism, the admirable strength of mind which enabled him to submit, without a single sigh of regret, to this unmitigated victory of fate over inclination, will be accepted as a stronger proof of his just claim to the honours of a hero, than any falling off in the

qualities he had imagined for himself can be against it. Not but what it may yet be shown, perhaps, late though it be, that had he been a "wilful man" he might, in some sort, "have had his way;" but historic truth enables the pen of his chronicler to rest his fame on much more comfortable grounds.

The house in Portman-square, of which it may be remembered that Mr. Dalrymple was wont to take so little heed, had now become a favourite residence with him for some months in every year. Not even at his old Scotch castle, well as they loved it, did the complexions of his children glow more brightly, or his lovely wife content his fastidious yearnings for English perfection more completely, than during these regular periodical returns to "the rank city."

It was in the course of one of these that the following scene took place.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Dalrymple were particularly attached to any of the Gibson family, and to its fair chieftess they might be said to entertain rather a particular dislike; nevertheless, for the sake of that "country-neighbour" feeling which has been mentioned before, so much of London visiting was still kept up between them, as to ensure Mrs. Dalrymple's appearance at least once during every season at the weekly intellectual assemblings of Mrs. Gibson, which continued as heretofore to contain an unequalled variety of talent and notoriety.

Exactly four years after the name of Clara Meddows had been lost in that of Clara Dalrymple, it happened that at the exhibition of the Royal Academy in Trafalgar-square, a very distinguished-looking group, consisting of two ladies respectively leaning on the arms of two gentlemen, attracted considerable attention, probably from the remarkable personal beauty of both the ladies, who, though in different styles, were certainly two as lovely women as could be seen any where, and on this occasion were without rivals, either on the modes, or before them.

There was also another group parading the rooms at the same time, composed of Mrs. Gibson, the two eldest Miss Gibsons, Mrs. Sherbourne, and Mr. Marchmont.

As "the Dalrymples" were decidedly the most brilliant stars in the fashionable line which had ever been brought to shine within the Gibson galaxy, they never became visible to any of the race, without producing a very considerable degree of sensation, and much increase of fuss and bustle.

"Mamma! Mamma! do you see?" exclaimed Miss Almeria, as she caught sight of the graceful figure of Mrs. Dalrymple fixed before one of the wonders of Landseer. "Pray don't let us stand here bothering about these stupid things in this room."

The Dalrymples are exactly the people to follow about at an exhibition, they understand pictures so perfectly. They have lived so in Italy, that it would be absurd not to have a respect for their judgment. Do let us go into the next room, will you?"

"I have no sort of objection, my dear," returned her mamma, adding aloud in a voice of imposing authority—"Upon my word I don't know what the exhibition will come to. It decidedly gets worse and worse every year! What a dreadful bore it must be to people like the Dalrymples!"

"Who is it that she has got with her?" demanded the still great Regenerator, as he assisted his ever faithful patroness and friend to make her way through the crowd, "he looks like a clergyman."

"Yes, certainly, it is a clergyman—I wonder who in the world it can be. Something distinguished, you may depend upon it; they are so tremendously exclusive, you know.—But there is Dalrymple himself—What a beautiful little woman he has got upon his arm! She too must be somebody, of course. Do contrive to make your way, my dear friend, through these idlers that are crowding round that picture of the Duke of Wellington, as if their lives depended upon who should get nearest to it. Upon my word and honour this exhibition is the vulgarest bear-garden in Europe! Pray push forward, Mr. Marchmont! Don't you see they are moving on! Almeria, look back for Mrs. Sherbourne and Theodosia—and make them a sign to follow us. Good Heaven! we shall never overtake them."

After a good deal of violent exertion, Mrs. Gibson, Mr. Marchmont, and Miss Almeria did succeed, however, in overtaking the party of which they were in chase; but by the time they had reached it, the order of the group was changed, the clergyman being in possession of the arm of the "beautiful little woman," and Mr. Dalrymple having that of his wife, who was detaining him for a moment to pass judgment upon the likeness of a portrait, before which they stood apparently in great admiration.

"My dearest Mrs. Dalrymple!—how enchanted I am to see you!" vociferated Mrs. Gibson, as she elbowed her last plunge through the crowd which had divided her from her valued friends. "What a mob? Isn't it dreadful? Mr. Dalrymple, I need hardly ask you what your opinion is of all these acres of canvas! You that have been so much abroad can have but one opinion about it."

"I am almost as much astonished as delighted, Mrs. Gibson," he replied; "and I confess I think it very likely that my having seen several exhibitions of modern pictures abroad may have something to do with the pride and admiration which I feel for those at home. There is no country in the world which can show a collection of modern paintings comparable in excellence

to that which surrounds us here. The progressive improvement, too, is as striking as it is delightful."

"How beautifully patriotic that is, Mr. Dalrymple! and it is perfectly heroic too, when it is so much the fashion to abuse every thing of the kind," returned Mrs. Gibson. "I was just saying to Mr. Marchmont that I must positively make my way to you, because it was such a treat to hear your opinion. Your word, he says, is law."

Thus amiably brought forward, Mr. Marchmont ventured a bow and a smiling remark. Miss Almeria managed to thrust her hand within reach of Mrs. Dalrymple's, and the two parties remained for some minutes so completely together as to become one to the eyes of all beholders. This was exceedingly satisfactory to the Gibson portion of it; but Mrs. Dalrymple ventured to interrupt a rather long speech of Mr. Marchmont's, by saying, "I fear, Arthur, that we shall lose our friends if we linger behind them any longer. Good morning, Mrs. Gibson—Good morning."

But when two parties have been thus joined together, it must be by the will of both that they are put asunder; and though Mrs. Dalrymple's onward movement was not impeded, she did not get beyond reach of Mrs. Gibson's very audible observations, Miss Almeria's affectionate familiarity, or Mr. Marchmont's sententious criticism.

At length the clergyman and the little beauty were overtaken, and a few steps more brought the united groups to a room comparatively free from the pressure of the crowd. It was then that Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Marchmont at one and the same instant recognised their old acquaintance Charles Chesterfield in the young clergyman who was now again honoured with the arm of Mrs. Dalrymple. For "one moment and no more," they both stood doubtful whether he was to be hailed as a dear and valued friend, or passed as an utter stranger. There could hardly have been given a more illustrious proof of the "excellent sympathy" which still existed between these faithful friends than the simultaneous movement with which each pressed the arm of the other, as they stepped forward and exclaimed as it were with one voice, "Mr. Chesterfield!"

As our hero had no reason in the world against acknowledging the acquaintance thus claimed, he returned the smiling salutation of both with perfect good-humour, and gave his ready hand in succession to the mother, daughter, and their illustrious friend, not only without reluctance, but with a sensation of very natural delight at remembering how very greatly things were changed with him since he had enjoyed this honour last. But this joy was from his heart, and did in no degree curl his lip.

“How long have you been in town, my dear Chesterfield?” demanded Mr. Marchmont, forgetting, with admirable audacity, all the circumstances of their last interview, and by no means without hope of getting some more contributions gratis. “I have been perpetually endeavouring to hear tidings of you—but all we have learnt about you is that you have become a clergyman and a benedick—I heartily wish you joy of both.—But tell me, my dear Chesterfield, is that very charming person the lady in question? Let me entreat to be presented immediately. It is only on seeing her that we can wish you joy properly.”

Almost at the same moment that this request was made to Charles by the Regenerator, a similar one was performed by Mrs. Gibson to Mrs. Dalrymple. “Is it possible that I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Charles Chesterfield?” said she, with great fervour. “How very fortunate I consider myself in having met her thus!—Pray introduce me, dearest Mrs. Dalrymple! I cannot tell you how anxious I am to make her acquaintance.”

These urgent requests being complied with, and the blushing Bessy (for the little beauty was no other) presented in form to the trio, Mrs. Gibson said, “And where are you, my dear Mrs. Chesterfield? I shall be delighted to have the happiness of calling upon you, and shall hope to catch you for one of my evenings.”

“Mrs. Charles Chesterfield is staying with me, Mrs. Gibson,” said Mrs. Dalrymple; “and we shall be very happy to see you in Portman-square, whenever it may be agreeable to you to call.”

“I am delighted to hear it!” returned Mrs. Gibson, with great animation. “You must remember, my dear Mrs. Dalrymple, how exceedingly attached we all were to Mr. Chesterfield in his younger days, you know; and I trust you will not any of you refuse to give me the excessive pleasure of seeing the whole party on Tuesday next. Positively you must promise me, dearest Mrs. Dalrymple! My ‘Paradise Lost’ is at last entirely finished, and most superbly bound in forty-three volumes—and next Tuesday it is to make one of my lions. It will be such a pleasure to show it to dear Mrs. Chesterfield! I do implore you not to disappoint me!”

Just as Mrs. Dalrymple was about to pronounce a favourable answer, the eye of Mrs. Gibson caught sight of her daughter Theodosia and Mrs. Sherbourne, approaching from the room they had just left; and feeling that the brilliancy of “her Tuesday” would run a very terrible risk if the latter lady made her appearance as one of her party, she turned suddenly round, and whispered in the ear of Almeria, “Stop her for God’s sake!” The young lady’s eye followed the direction of her mamma’s, and, feeling the importance of the command, she flew to obey it, in

time to prevent the very lucky Charles Chesterfield from the disagreeable encounter, by leading the still soul-subduing little Sappho back into the great room before his eye had caught sight of her, or her subduing orbs had once more rested upon him."

"My dearest Mrs. Sherbourne!" said the young lady, in an accent of very tender sympathy—"For Heaven's sake sit down here for a minute or two. There are some people in the other room that I am sure it would kill you to see. Sit down! Sit down, don't I tell you! For mercy's sake sit down."

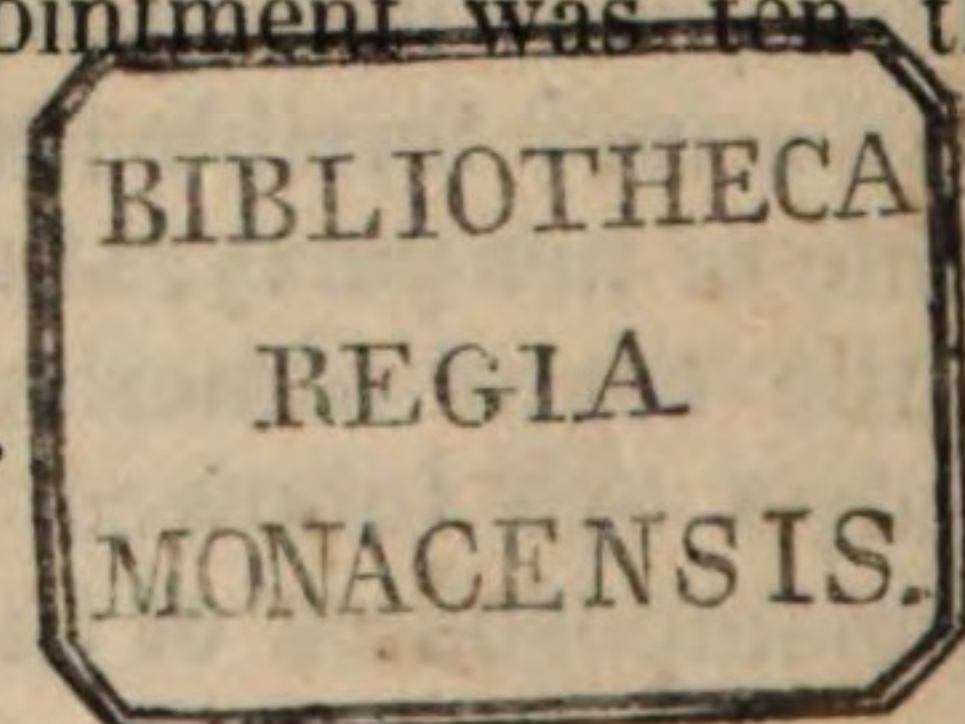
"*Oh Dio! Che dico?* What mean you, love?" replied the poetess, throwing herself upon a bench, shaking back her ringlets, and suffering the identical old shawl of former days to fall from her still slippery shoulders, precisely after the manner of the years that were gone. "Who is it that I should thus dread to see? Speak, Almeria. Solve this fearful mystery."

"Charles Chesterfield!" whispered her sympathising friend. It was a beautiful opportunity, and Mrs. Sherbourne instantly fainted, speedily becoming the centre of a group of smelling-bottles, and a crowd of eyes; in which condition Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Marchmont had the gratification of taking possession of her, after having seen the Dalrymple party safely descending the stairs.

This was the nearest approach to a meeting with his only infidelity which ever befel our fortunate hero. Yet, more than once did he and his thrice happy little wife enjoy the hospitality of Portman Square; for the friendships begun during Clara's short but eventful visit at Maplebury farm continued to unite the families of Dalrymple and Chesterfield for more than one generation; and the presentation to an excellent living, close to Mr. Dalrymple's Herefordshire residence, cemented this friendship by the additional ties of patronage and close neighbourhood.

Need it be added that the good farmer and all his race had their share in all the honour and happiness of this close union? In truth, there were ties of mutual obligation and mutual gratitude which bound them all together in a bond of union as firm in its nature as precious in its effect; and Mrs. Dalrymple often quotes her early averseness to Charles Chesterfield's visit to London as a proof how little mortals know what events are good, and what evil, for them—to which excellent observation our Youth of Genius has more than once been heard to reply, that most unquestionably there were cases in which disappointment was ten thousand times preferable to success.

THE END.



W. Aumann ...
Buchbinderei ...
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Trollope, Frances Milton,

Charles Chesterfield; or, the adventures of a youth of genius

Paris 1841

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